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A QUEER FAMILY



at

BY

EFFIE W. MERRIMAN

AUTHOR OF "PARDS: A STORY OF TWO HOMELESS BOYS"
EDITOR OF "THE HOUSEKEEPER," MINNEAPOLIS

111

BOSTON 1891

LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS

10 MILK ST. NEXT "THE OLD SOUTH MEETING HOUSE"

NEW YORK CHARLES T. DILLINGHAM

718 AND 720 BROADWAY

LOWER HALL.

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P 54

(24) 92

Apr 21/11

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University Press
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE

TO

My Little Niece

MARIAN L. DAGGETT

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

WITH THE HOPE THAT SHE MAY EXPERIENCE AS
MUCH PLEASURE IN READING IT AS THE
AUTHOR DID IN WRITING IT

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A QUEER FAMILY.

CHAPTER FIRST.

"It beats all, Andy, how hard times is! We've been in purty tight places afore this, but we've never been squoze as we're a-gittin' squoze now."

"I don't know what's going to become of us, Bob," answered the younger of the two boys with a half-suppressed sob, as he tried to warm his stiffened fingers by the tiny blaze in the old stove.

Bob looked at his companion keenly, and then said in a tone half contemptuous, half speculative, —

"Yer goin' ter squall, Andy. Yer hain't had a squallin' spell fer purty near an hour,

an' I spect yer so full o' tears that yer feel zif yer 'd bust. Well, squall, if yer've got ter, an' then we'll git down ter bizness."

A look of reproach crept into Andy's blue eyes, but he said nothing. He was cold and hungry, and his poor little heart ached for the mother who had died but a little while before, and who, though often unable to keep hunger and cold away from him, always knew how to make them much easier to bear.

"It beats all, Andy, how quick yer can git 'em up,—the squally spells, I mean. What good do they do yer, anyhow? It all comes o' havin' a mother ter baby yer up. If a mother can't live till a feller's growed up, she'd orter die afore he's old enough ter know 'bout it. If yer'd had ter git 'long 'thout a mother so long as I have, yer'd find that a feller's got ter stop squallin' an' go ter hustlin', if he spects ter keep hissself from starvin' 'thout goin' to ther jail or work'us'."

"Yes, Bob." Andy was still rubbing his

fingers before the little blaze that was rapidly growing smaller, and tears were running down his cheeks, though he made no sound of sobbing. Bob turned away that he might not see them, and continued the conversation.

“This room hain’t so mighty nice as it mought be, I s’pose, an’ at the present speakin’ it hain’t hot enough ter make us spile our clothes a-sweatin’; but it’s enough sight better ’n no home at all, an’ I guess we can keep ourselves from freezin’, even if we do have ter go empty onct in a while.”

“But, Bob, what will we do if we can’t stay here, and what will we do if we can’t find any more wood that’s been dropped, and where can we get the three dollars for the rent, and — and what’s going to become of us, anyway? Oh, Bob, Brother Bob, what is going to become of us?”

Andy laid his head on the little kitchen-table, and his slight frame shook with the sobs which he could no longer repress.

Bob arose and walked across the floor once or twice, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his ragged trousers; then coming close to Andy, he laid one arm tenderly across his shoulder.

“Poor brother Andy!” he said softly; “it all comes o’ havin’ had a mother ter baby yer.”

With that he left the room and went across the dark little entry into another room of the same size, in which no fire had been built for months, and where the atmosphere was far below the freezing-point.

“I’ll jist stay out here till he gits shet o’ the worst of it,” he said, dancing energetically to keep himself from freezing. “I can’t jaw him all the time, an’ I can’t see him squall ’thout jawin’ him.”

In a few moments he returned to the room where he had left Andy, and found him sitting very straight and with a defiant look on his face that warned Bob not to mention the little scene which had just taken place.

“I don’t like to give this here room up, blamed if I do,” began Bob, as if there had been no break in the conversation. “I did n’t know afore I come here what ornery business it was, — this layin’ down fer a snooze jist where I mought happen ter be. Time was when I did n’t think nothin’ ’bout it; but this here ’ristocratic way o’ livin’ has purty near sp’iled me, I guess, an’ we’ve got ter git the three dollars fer the rent jist as sure as shootin’. It’s got ter come, but where it’s goin’ ter come from beats this chicken’s calkerlations all holler.”

“Oh, Bob, if we only could get it! I can’t go away from here. I’d be so homesick I’d die. I’ve lived here ever since. I can remember; an’ mother, she — ”

Andy stopped abruptly, and going to the window stood looking at the rows and rows of house-roofs which were spread out before him as if he had never seen them before. Bob went to the table, and stooping down

drew an old violin from beneath it. No one ever saw Bob very long without his precious violin. It had been given him several years before by an old rag-peddler of his acquaintance who had picked it up on one of his rounds in search of rags.

Bob knew nothing at all of music, and if he had he would not have been able to produce it from the battered old instrument which had not been worth much in its best days; but he was very fond of music, and would follow a brass band on the street as long as there was any hope of hearing it play or until he was so tired that he could walk no farther. He loved to sing also. He had a good voice; and as he knew no songs, he had a habit of improvising them, and Andy thought them almost as good as those his mother used to sing.

The old violin was put through a process that Bob called "tuning;" and then, after a few dreadful notes were played, the song was started. It was something like this:—

“Oh, we hain’t got nary wood,
An’ we hain’t got nary coal;
An’ we hain’t got nary victuals,
Nor a red cent ter our names.
But what ’s the use er mopin’,
An’ what ’s the use er squallin’?
We ’ve got ter git up an’ git, git, git,
If we keeps the roof from fallin’.

By jimminy jocks! Andy, did yer hear the last o’ that? Did n’t it come out sple-endid? It’s jist ’xactly as good as if it had been writ, hain’t it?”

“Better than some things I’ve heard,” answered Andy, heartily; and Bob was satisfied. He considered Andy quite an authority in such matters.

“Andy, I’ve thunk o’ somethin’,” he said suddenly, laying his violin on the table. “I’ve thunk why we hain’t never made our fortins.”

“Why, Bob?”

Andy had left the window, and was again standing over the little stove.

“Fire’s purty near died,” said Bob. “We

can use a leetle more wood now, seein' as how I've thunk o' what I have."

The fire was replenished, and Bob took his seat opposite Andy and very close to him.

"Andy, we hain't never made our fortins 'cause we hain't gone at it in the right way. It don't make a speck o' diff'rence how hard we work; if we hain't a-workin' right, we hain't a-goin' ter git there. Now, what have we been a-doin' of? Jist this, — I've played, an' yer has passed yer cap fer pennies. That's old. There hain't a monkey what is sich a fool that he can't do that. Folks has got kinder sick o' seein' it, an' they look at yer zif yer was a long ways off, an' could n't git a spondulic if they should throw one at yer."

"Yes," said Andy, nodding, "you've got it about right so far, blamed if you have n't."

"We've got ter git up suthin' new, Andy, — suthin' ter 'tract the public; that's jist what we've got ter do. An' when we do, yer can bet yer last cent that we hain't a-goin' ter be

so sneakin' poor as we be now. Let's go an' see if we can find some wood layin' around loose, an' when we git back mebbe I'll have suthin' more thunk up."

The room which the boys occupied was not very large, though much larger than some rooms which large families are obliged to live in. In one corner, on an old piece of rag-carpet, was a coarse bed-tick filled with broken straw and covered with some well-worn patch-work quilts which were far from being clean. The rest of the furniture consisted of a cheap kitchen table, two battered wooden chairs, an old kitchen stove, a few cracked dishes in a cupboard which was built into the wall, and some wooden boxes which were used for various purposes. The upper half of the little square windows was curtained by newspapers which had been cut in pretty lace-like designs, and other papers cut in scallops decorated the shelves of the almost empty cupboard. They had been placed there, fresh and clean, by

Andy's mother only a few days before she died. Now they were soiled, ragged, and yellow.

The windows were very small, but there were four of them, so that the room was well lighted. The room was directly under the roof of the tallest tenement building in the city, and there was but one other room in the building so far from the ground. This was the one into which Bob had gone when Andy began to cry. It was of the same size as that occupied by the boys, and separated from it by a little hall.

✓ Andy could remember when his mother rented both of these rooms, and that one of them had a carpet on the floor. She kept her wood-box in the entry then, and had a screen before it; but that was long, long ago, before she became sick and was obliged to sell all of her furniture that could be spared. Since that time one of the rooms had been unoccupied. Three dollars a month was thought by most persons to be too high rent to pay for

rooms so far from the ground and without modern conveniences.

Poor little Andy! It had been less than a year since he had had a mother to comfort him when he was in trouble, and his need of comfort had never been so great as since she had been taken away. They had always been poor, even in the days when there had been a carpet on the floor; and during the last two years of the mother's life there had been many times when the little boy had gone to bed hungry, and many days when he had been obliged to lie in bed most of the time because there was no fire. But such things never troubled him then as they had since. They were unpleasant, to be sure; but Mother sang and told stories while she worked, and he very soon forgot all about the hunger and cold. He was always sure that Mother could manage to have everything come out right. Now he was beginning to realize how hard it had been for her to keep them both from starving, and every

day he felt more certain that she had died of hard work, hunger, and cold.

He could never forget that morning when he had called to her that it was time to get up, nor how hard it was to understand the neighbors, whom he asked to come and waken her, when they told him she was dead.

It was while he was sitting with her, waiting for the men who were coming to take her forever out of his sight, that Bob had happened to come into the room. He had seen Bob several times. He had first met him down by the corner grocery, and had stopped to listen to him as he played on the cracked violin, and Bob had noticed him at once. The mother had watched over her boy very closely, not allowing him to play with the children in the neighborhood; and when Andy told her of Bob, and that they had talked together, and Bob had asked whether he would go into a partnership with him, she had immediately discouraged the idea.

"But I could help you earn money, Mother," he urged.

"Yes, dear, I know," she replied; "but as long as I can work I would rather you should not earn money in that way. When I become too tired to work any more, then you may be obliged to."

When Bob entered the room that day with his violin under his arm and his good-natured, freckled face looking as cheerful as if nothing had ever happened to make any one sad, a feeling of thankfulness crept into Andy's heart, and he did not feel quite so much alone in the world as he had a moment before.

"Hello, Andy! give us yer paw!" exclaimed Bob, cheerfully. Then he caught sight of the silent form on the bed, and lowered his voice a little, as he asked, with a nod towards it, "Hain't yer got nobody else?"

"No," sobbed the little fellow, "and I sha'n't have her long. Oh, Bob, I don't want them to take her away! I can look at her now, and

that is something, even if she can't speak to me. Oh, Bob, Bob, I don't know what is going to become of me!"

"Waal, I do!" answered Bob. "I know blamed well. I'm goin' ter be a mother ter yer."

"Oh, Bob, don't say that, please don't! No one else could be a mother to me."

"Course not!" answered Bob, promptly. "I did n't mean that 'xactly; but I'll be some-thin' ter yer, if yer'll only tell me what yer'd like. I reckon I can fill 'most any kind of a bill."

"I'd like a brother, Bob," said Andy, after a moment's hesitation. "I've always wished I had a brother."

"Yer've struck it, my boy!" exclaimed Bob; "yer've struck it rich. We'll both be brothers. A brother is a piece of furniter what I hain't had nuther, though I can't say as how I've got sick a-wishin' fer one. Howsumever, we'll be brothers; an' now let 's shake on that."

The boys shook hands again, and then Bob continued, —

“Now, yer mustn’t squall, Brother, ’cause I ’m goin’ ter take keer of yer, an’ I’ll fix everythin’ all right in a jiffy, or two jiffies at most. Course it ’s bad ’bout yer mother ; but yer ’d git tired afore long, if yer had ter have her a-layin’ ’round this way. Here they be ; they’ve come ter git her. Now all yer’ve got ter do is jist to act like a brave man, — one what ’s a-goin’ to the opery or somethin’, an’ don’t let all the old women what’s comin’ git a chance to laugh at yer ’count o’ yer squallin’.”

CHAPTER SECOND.

WHEN Andy reached home with the little armful of wet bark which he had picked up along the river-bank, he found Bob and a bright fire awaiting him.

"Huh!" exclaimed Bob; adding cheerfully, "could n't yer do any better'n that? See the daisy lot I brung. Man wanted ter run inter a house, an' I hopped in front o' him an' telled him I'd hold his hosses if he'd give me some o' his wood. He guv me all I could lug, an' when I got here I felt zif somebody'd been a usin' me ter drive spiles with."

"You can do everything better than I can. Brother Bob," answered Andy. "I don't know what I'd do without you;" and he smiled lovingly at his companion.

“I’d hang myself if ’twa’n’t fer you; I would, by hokey!” answered Bob. “Why, Brother Andy, yer — yer — waal, yer as nice as a baskit o’ chips, that’s jist what yer be!” and Bob began to poke the fire, hoping that Andy would understand that quite enough time had been wasted on sentiment. Andy understood.

“Did you think of anything?” he asked.

“Yer bet I did!” answered Bob, straightening himself and giving his chest a resounding blow with his clinched fist. “Yer bet I did, Brother Andy. Yer may bet yer bottom dollar an’ yer life ter boot, an’ win slick as a dude. What I thunk is a burnin’ secret locked up in this here buzzum o’ mine,” giving himself another blow, “an’ no one hain’t a-goin’ ter know nothin’ ’bout it till we’ve had some grub. Look here! I had a dime, an’ I did a leetle buyin’!”

“Bread and sausage!” exclaimed Andy. “Oh, Bob, I’m nearly starved; let’s hurry.”

There were never two friends more dissimilar than Bob and Andy, yet they lived together peaceably and loved each other dearly. Bob had been very careless of his money before he had any one depending upon him for support. He had spent what little he earned as fast as it came into his possession, for whatever happened to strike his fancy at the time. If he went hungry or cold in consequence, he bore it philosophically ; and if he resolved to do better next time, he never kept the resolution. But when he went to live with Andy and to care for him, a great change came over him. He was too manly to allow another to suffer because of his carelessness, or to give up what he had undertaken to do because it was less easy than he had thought it would be. His new cares developed in him quite a business-like ability, and he soon began to try to plan for the future, that his little friend might not suffer.

“Andy’s allers had a home,” he would say to himself. “He ain’t used ter layin’ ’round loose

as I be, an' he jist could n't stan' it. I never had no one what cared whether I got dead or not, 'cept Andy, an' he's got ter be took care of, or I've got ter pizen myself fer a rat."

When the last morsel of bread and sausage had disappeared, the two boys put their feet on the old stove, leaned back in the rickety chairs, and announced themselves as ready for business.

"Well?" asked Andy. "I'm listening, Brother Bob."

"Andy, did yer ever dance?"

"No-o-o, not much. Why?"

"Don't yer spect yer could dance like the dickens if yer tried?"

"Maybe. Why?"

"How's yer wind?"

"I don't know; good, I guess. Why, Bob?"
Andy was becoming impatient.

"Waal, this! I've been a-thinkin' as how we mought fix up ter 'tract 'tention. I know Jake the ragman; you've saw him. We could

borry some fixin's o' him if he's got 'em. Catch on?"

"I don't know; not very much, I guess."

"Waal, poke up yer brains a leetle, so they'll blaze livelier! We'll dress ourselves in the fixin's. We'll stand on a corner where folks is a-passin' purty constant. I'll play some rattlin' tunes. Yer'll dance 'em out. Have yer got the sense o' my meanin' now, or hain't yer?"

"Yes," answered Andy, somewhat vaguely.

"Yer see," said Bob, in an explanatory way, "so far yer've only stood on yer head onc't or twic't, an' turned a somerset or a measly hand-spring or two, an' it's allers happened that there hain't been nobody round ter see yer who cared a spondulic fer sech doin's. They've saw 'em too many times. What we've got ter do is ter set the fashion in suthin' if we spect ter 'tract the public, an' we can't make our fortins or keep this here room 'thout first 'tractin' the public. Three cheers for our splendiferous

bran-new ijec; then we'll do our purtiest skip-pin' for Jake the Ragman's."

The cheers were given with enthusiasm; then the boys put on their caps and started on a run towards the dirty underground room where a coarse man with long uncombed hair was sorting rags.

"Hello, kids!" he exclaimed, as the boys entered the room; "what yer sneakin' 'round here fer? Git out! I don't want yer a-stealin' o' my fine rags."

He spoke roughly, but the boys were not at all alarmed. More than once he had proved a friend to Bob in time of need, and in his eyes there was always a pleasant smile for the poor little waifs when they visited him.

"We're hankerin' arter some o' yer rags," said Bob; "but what we wants is ter borry 'em."

Then he hastily explained the object of the visit, and made Jake understand that his greatest wish was to attract the public.

"All right!" exclaimed Jake. "Trust ter

me. I'll make yer look zif yer'd jist got out of a idjit 'sylum."

When at last the boys were pronounced dressed, the good-natured old rag-peddler was well pleased with his efforts. His only fear was that the "cops," meaning the policemen, might not allow them to stay on the streets.

Bob was attired in an old hoop-skirt and wire bustle. A long, ragged veil was tied over his freckled face, and a well-worn feather duster ornamented his hat, from which the brim had long ago disappeared.

"If the cops 'u'd git a good look at yer," said Jake, "they'd bust theirselves a-laughin'; but I'm most afeard they'll turn their heads t' other way when they're shovin' yer in."

"No harm tryin', anyhow," answered Bob, cheerfully. "'Tain't zif I could n't slip out o' this here toggery in a jiffy if they tells me to, an' I'll help Andy."

Andy looked as if he would need a great deal of help, if he ever came out of his queer suit.

Jake had endeavored to dress him to represent a Japanese.

“Call him the ‘little Mikado,’” he said to Bob, “’an you ’ll git a crowd. Dancin’ Japane-sers is all the go now, an’ they hain’t common in this city as yet.”

A ragged but gayly striped undershirt was brought from a bundle of rags in one corner of the room, and formed Andy’s chief garment. One sometimes sees such shirts worn by teamsters as an over-garment. This one must have belonged to a very big man at one time, for it reached nearly to Andy’s ankles, and the sleeves, although worn off at the bottom, were yet long enough to come over his hands. A very large straw hat was lined with folds of paper to keep it from slipping over his ears, and black cloth was torn into strips and braided, then fastened to the back of the hat, and allowed to fall down Andy’s back, like a Chinaman’s “pig-tail.”

Two funnier-looking objects than our little

friends in their new costumes never walked on the streets of any city ; and as old Jake watched them making their way to a corner of the street where a great many people passed, he laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“I hate to be seen, Bob ; I do, for a fact,” whispered Andy, shrinking closer to his companion as he saw the look of amusement in the eyes of the people who passed him. “See what a crowd of boys is following us ! Oh, Brother Bob, it seems as if I’d almost rather die. Just hear them yell, Bob ! Let’s run, won’t you ?”

“No ! Let ’em yell, if they wants to, an’ let ’em foller. Who cares ?” answered Bob. “They’re a-advertisin’ us, Andy ; that’s jist what they’re doin’. I’m a-goin’ ter chip in a yell purty soon, an’ then yer’ll hear yellin’ as is yellin’. Come now, Brother Andy, don’t yer think o’ the folkses what’s follerin’. Don’t yer think how yer looks, nuther, but jist keep up a hefty thinkin’ ’bout that there

little room what yer mother used ter live in, an' how bad we wants ter pay the rent; an' dance yer purtiest. We kin keep the room, Andy, if yer dances lively; I jist know we kin."

"I'll do my best, Bob. Mother would want me to, if she was here."

Bob began scraping on his violin, and calling to the crowd in a voice which was intended to make the other street-gamins green with envy.

"This way, gentlemen!" he called. "This way, ladies, if yer pleases. Here's where yer gits yer hifalutin' dancist. Jist roll yer eye over this here bloomin' Japaneser what jist come over from Paris on a bicycle. Look at the fine steps he's a-takin'! Look, Mr. P'lice-man! doesn't this here draw tears to yer eyes?"

The last remark was addressed to a policeman who had come up to learn what was attracting such a crowd, and who, after one glance at the two boys, turned and walked

away, with a broad smile twitching the corners of his mustache. As he did so, he could plainly hear Bob, who was now singing in a high falsetto, —

“ Give us a penny, for we needs it bad,
For jist a week ago we spended all we had,
An’ it ’s worth a nickel of any feller’s cash,
Ter see this Japaneser.”

Andy’s dancing was funny to see, and the crowd around the boys laughed heartily. Andy’s cheeks grew crimson, and his eyes filled with tears; but he kept on until he was forced to pause for breath, then passed his great hat, “pig tail” and all, among the crowd, and was repaid for his trouble by more money than either of the two boys had ever before seen at one time.

“ Give ’em another jig, Andy ! ” shouted Bob. “ We’ll give ’em their money’s worth. We ain’t beggars, nor hippercrites, nor dudes, nor cranks ; we’re jist plain, every-day gentlemen what’s got ter work fer a livin’. Step up, Andy !

Dance yer purtiest! Whoop'ee! Kick like a pig what's got stuck in a fence!"

Andy redoubled his efforts, and did not stop dancing until he was so tired that he could hardly stand.

"Oh, dear! he has stopped," exclaimed a voice close beside him, as he started to drag himself home. "I do wish that funny boy would jump some more, don't you, Mamie?"

Andy turned, and saw two little girls and a boy somewhat larger than Bob standing near him, each with a very large bundle.

CHAPTER THIRD.

THE reader is invited to go into the country to meet other important characters in this story. It was early in November, and the country people were complaining quite as much as their city cousins about the weather, which was unusually cold for that season of the year. Many of the farmers were unprepared for winter, and were working hard to get ready for it. The sun had nearly gone to rest, and from the back doorway of a little, unpainted, uninviting farmhouse the sound of a horn was heard far across the fields, telling the busy workers there that supper was ready for them. Two little girls in one of the fields straightened their tired bodies, and drew the wooden husking-pegs from their hands.

"Is that all you've done?" asked a man gruffly, as he looked at the pile of golden ears between them.

"It is all we could do, Uncle; we worked hard, and it is so cold to-day," answers the elder of the two girls, blowing her purple fingers to get them warm.

The man grunted some sort of a reply which they did not understand, then walked to the farmhouse, leaving them to follow. Just before they entered the house, they were accosted by their brother.

"To the post-office as soon as you can after tea," he said in a low voice; and they nodded an assent, and watched him as he hurried away to the house which he called home, the roof of which could just be seen by his sisters as they stood in the doorway of the little house where they lived.

The post-office referred to was a great oak-tree in the side of which was a hole where the children put letters for one another; for there

were often days at a time when that was the only means of communication between the brother and his sisters. Mrs. Bradley, the mother of the three children, had been killed in a railway accident nearly two years before, and their father had been gone for so many years that they hardly remembered him at all, and did not know whether he was living or dead. He had gone to sea, so their mother told them, expecting to return in a year. She had received a few letters during the first months of his absence, and that was all. Mrs. Bradley managed to keep her children together and send them to school; but when she was suddenly taken away from them, there was nothing left for their support. A sister and brother of Mr. Bradley offered them homes,—the sister taking the two girls, as she had no children of her own, and the brother taking Dave, as his only child was a girl.

The children had never before been separated, and the separation coming so soon after the

mother's death was very hard for them to bear. Their new homes were quite as well furnished as their mamma's home had been, but were prim and cheerless and uninviting in every way, forming a very unpleasant contrast to the sunny home where their mother had been queen among them.

The children did not know, until after the death of the mother, that she had married against the wishes of her parents and never been forgiven by them, and that no letter ever passed between them. When their aunt told them of it, she refused to tell them of the mother's people or to let them know that she was dead.

In their new homes they were expected to make themselves useful. They were told that they must pay for the trouble they made; and although they did their best they never succeeded in giving satisfaction. They had very little time to themselves, and brother and sisters were seldom allowed to visit together, because

it was thought by the elders to be a foolish waste of time. It was a happy day for them when they discovered the hole in the great tree which grew in a pasture half-way between the two houses, and thought of using it as a post-box. All the light-brown wrapping-paper was carefully saved as soon as it came from the stores, and ironed smooth to serve as a means of communication. If the uncle and aunt could have read some of the letters which told of the unpleasant life the children led, of their great longing to be together again, and the wonderful things they meant to do when they were old enough to care for themselves, this little story might never have been written.

“What do you suppose Dave wants?” asked Mamie, in a half whisper.

“Don’t know,” was her sister’s reply. “It must be something very particular, or he’d have written it.”

The girls did up the work after tea quickly, then asked permission to take a little walk.

"No," was the answer, "you'd better go to bed. If you can't get exercise enough without wearing out your shoes running around the country, I can find something useful for you to do."

"But, Auntie," said Kate, her lip trembling a little, "we want to see Dave. We have n't seen him for ever so many days. Please let us go."

"Well, you may go; but don't stay more than half an hour. There's no sense in it, anyhow. The idea that you've got to whine around, if you don't see Dave every day. You, and Dave too, would be much better off if you were a hundred miles apart."

The girls waited to hear no more, but hurried away toward the big tree, and soon were seated beneath it, one on each side of Brother Dave.

"What is it, Dave? Tell us, quick! We must be back in half an hour," said Kate.

"I've got a plan, girls. We are not happy here, and never can be. What do you say to running away some bright night?"

“Running away! Oh, Dave! where could we go, and how could we live, and —”

“Not so many questions at once. I can’t answer them, for I don’t know. I’m only thinking about it. Of course, we won’t make a start until we know what we’re going to do; but if we make up our minds to go sometime, we’ll have something nice to think about,— don’t you see?”

“If we could all be together, Dave,” said Mamie.

“In a home of our own, — a cosey home, such as we had when Mamma was living,” added Kate.

“We can,” answered Dave. “I don’t believe that I’ve forgotten so much about life in the city that I couldn’t manage to take care of you.”

Dave spoke confidently, and the girls had a great deal of faith in him.

“Let’s go, Dave!” they said eagerly.

“All right! We must get a good ready, first. Keep quiet about it, and depend on me.”

The girls knew that by this time their half-hour must be up, and that they must be prompt if they expected to get leave from Aunt Lucy to go out again.

One day, not long afterward, the girls found a letter in the post-office from Dave. It was very short. "Come to the post-office," it read, "as soon as the folks are asleep. Wear all the clothes you can get on, and bring the rest in a bundle. We start to-night."

The letter was received just before tea-time, and the little girls were so excited over it that it was a wonder their aunt's suspicions were not aroused. She might have observed them more closely, if she had not been so angry because Mamie broke a teacup while washing the supper dishes.

At last the girls were allowed to go to their room.

"Don't you feel awful?" whispered Mamie.

"Yes," acknowledged Kate; "it seems just as if somebody was going to die."

"I'm almost afraid to go ; are n't you ?"

"Almost ; but Dave will be expecting us, and we've got to."

"Aunt Lucy says if it was n't for this home, we'd have been in the poor-house long ago."

"Well, the poor-house could n't be any worse than this is," answered Kate. Aunt Lucy had been very severe with her, that day, and she had not got over her resentment.

"That's so !" answered Mamie, as she began to make preparations for the journey.

A valise which had been their mother's was filled with the clothes they could not wear, and was so heavy that they had to carry it between them. While they were doing the evening work they put up a basket of food, as Dave had told them they must do. A neighbor had come to see Aunt Lucy, and while they were talking the basket was filled and carried to the little bedroom.

People on farms usually go to bed early, and seldom lock their doors, for they have little fear

of murderers or thieves ; and the little girls had no trouble in getting out of doors long before midnight with all their bundles, and without being discovered.

“ Goodness, Dave ! ” exclaimed Kate, as they reached the tree where their brother was waiting for them, “ we did n’t bring a thing we could get along without ; yet our bundles are so heavy that we’re pretty near dead already. I don’t believe we can go a mile farther.”

Dave took the valise. “ Anything here but your clothes ? ” he asked.

“ I brought Mother’s picture, and Mamie brought her Bible, and we brought our school reader, besides. They are in the valise,” answered Kate.

“ And what have you in that basket, Mamie ? ”

“ Food ; just as much as we could get into it.”

“ And I’ve got Mother’s shawl and a blanket here,” added Kate. “ It makes an awful big bundle, but it is n’t so very heavy. If we have to sleep out doors, it will be handy.”

“Hush!” whispered Dave, warningly; “you’d better not talk much now, except in whispers.”

By this time the children had reached the barn belonging to the uncle with whom Dave lived.

“See!” he whispered, “there is the carriage which is going to carry us to the city. We have n’t got to walk.”

“Whose is it, Dave? Who said you might take it?” asked the girls.

“It’s a peddler’s wagon. The owner is asleep in the hay-barn. Uncle would n’t have him in the house.”

“Did he say we might go with him?”

“He said I might. He does n’t know anything about you; but I’ll fix that all right. He wants to travel to-night, so as to have to-morrow to buy goods. Everything seems fixed purposely for us. I’m taking care of his ponies; and he told me to hitch them up, and wake him at twelve o’clock. It’s pretty near that, now.”

While Dave talked in an excited whisper, he was stowing the bundles in the empty cart beside his own.

“I told him straight out just how I was used here,” he said, “and he got rather spunky because Uncle would n’t let him sleep in the house on such a cold night; so he said he’d let me ride with him. There! I’ve fixed some hay in the bottom of the cart, so I guess it won’t be very bad. Climb in! When I get the doors closed, he’ll never guess what he’s got in his old tin-cart.”

“But, Dave,” exclaimed Kate, “we’ll die shut up in that box!”

“Pshaw! no, you won’t, either. There are plenty of air-holes. I took pains to see about that before the sun went down.”

“It will be awfully dark in there,” said Mamie.

“What of that? You are n’t afraid of the dark, I hope. If you are, you’d better go back. You can’t expect to find everything

just to suit you. I should think you'd rather ride any way than walk and carry all those bundles. Climb in now, if you're going with me; if not, why —"

The girls waited to hear no more, but immediately climbed into their cramped quarters, and seated themselves as comfortably as they could. Then Dave shut and fastened the door, and soon after they heard him talking to the peddler, as he helped hitch the horses to the wagon.

"Where are your traps?" asked the peddler, as they climbed to the seat in front of the box. "If you're goin' fer good, I reckon you'll find use fer all you've got."

"I put them in behind," answered Dave. "I saw that the box was empty, and thought they would be out of the way there. This is our lunch," he added, pointing to his basket of lunch, which he carried because there was no room for it in the box.

"You must have packed food for a dozen,"

said the peddler, looking at the well-filled basket.

"Oh, no, sir, not more than a third of a dozen," answered Dave, demurely, but laughing a little under his breath, as he pictured to himself the old fellow's amazement when he should help the girls from the wagon to eat breakfast with them by the roadside.

The little girls were used to going to bed early, and in spite of their uncomfortable positions, they slept most of the time; although the minutes passed so slowly when they were awake that they believed they had scarcely slept at all. They were very glad when they heard the peddler tell Dave that it was seven o'clock in the morning, and they might as well stop and have breakfast.

"You didn't think to bring any hay for the nags, I'll bet a sixpence," he added.

"Yes, I did," replied Dave, jumping from his seat and going to the back of the wagon.

"Here, girls," he said, opening the door,

“you’d better get out and rest. I want some of that hay you’re sitting on.” He tried to speak in his most matter-of-fact tone, but his heart was beating so hard it almost choked him, and he did not succeed very well. The girls were so cramped that they could not alight without considerable help, and for a minute or two were unable to take a step.

The old peddler was a picture of astonishment when he saw them.

“Waal, I’ll be hanged plumb to gracious, if that don’t beat the ’tarnal stumps!” he finally exclaimed, angrily. “Young feller, what in the name o’ the created fiddlesticks does this mean?”

“These are my sisters, sir,” answered Dave, trembling a little. “They were just as bad off as I was, and I could n’t leave them. I knew you would n’t help them to run away.”

“You’re just right, I would n’t!” growled the man. “I am a fool for taking you. It will ruin my business in that part of the country

if I'm suspected, when they find out that these gals is missing. Not another step do any of you go with me. I never in my life played a bigger fool trick on myself."

Mamie began to cry softly to herself. She was very tired and nervous, and she thought they would all die if left alone on a country road when the weather was almost freezing cold; but Kate walked up to the man who was pacing back and forth across the road.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said. "We did n't think, when we started, that you might be blamed. We don't want you to be scolded for what we've done. I think we'd better go right back, and tell Uncle and Auntie that you did n't know anything about us."

"Go back!" repeated the peddler; "I guess you'd be tired, time you got there. We've been riding seven hours. However, I reckon I saw the blackest side of the affair the first lick; you took me so by surprise. Where you come from is n't the whole world by any means,

and all I've got to do is to trade somewhere else."

A fire was built by the roadside, and the girls then busied themselves laying out the lunch Dave had brought, intending to save theirs until they reached the city. The peddler and the children were soon good friends; and when they were again ready for a start, he fastened the door of the box open, and made the girls a little more comfortable than they had been before.

"Business is business with me," he said when they reached the city, a few hours later, "and must be 'tended to. If 't was n't for that, I'd run around with you a spell, and try to get you located. As it is, I might as well drop you here as anywhere, I s'pose. Here's a little present for each of you;" and he took three silver half-dollars from his pocket.

"Please don't!" said Kate; "you've done enough for us. We're not beggars."

"Of course not!" answered the man, "but



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“The Pedler and the Children were soon good friends.” Page 50.



you can take a present from a friend, I guess;” and he put the money in Dave’s hand. “Great guns and little fishes!” he added, when he saw the children take their bundles from the box; “what a load you’ve got! You’d better get a place to put your traps just as soon as you can. Now, good-by, and good luck to you!”

“Good-by,” answered the children; and then their friend had left them, and they felt themselves alone in a great city-full of people.

CHAPTER FOURTH.

"SHE stared at me as if I was made of wood and couldn't care," thought poor little Andy, as he made his way home after that first appearance as a "Japanese dancist." "They all stare that way," he continued bitterly; "and that girl wanted me to jump some more, as she said, just as if I didn't get any tireder than a jumping-jack. I wonder if Bob does n't care at all; he does n't act as if he felt bad. He just laughs all the time. I wish I was like Bob."

When Andy started for home he called to Bob to come with him, but for once Bob did n't hear.

"I do believe he's going to talk with that boy and the two girls," thought Andy; "and

it was one of those girls who laughed at me.” Then he hurried away, feeling that nothing could be harder to do than stand on the street in his queer costume and talk with any one who had laughed at him. He removed the offending garments as soon as he got into the room, then built a fire and looked about him.

“Well,” he said, giving the clothes a little kick, “I suppose it’s better to wear them and be laughed at than to sleep on the street as Bob used to. Mother used to say that she would rather I’d die than be obliged to live as Bob did.”

Just then there was a sound of several pairs of feet on the stairs, and then the door was pushed open and Bob walked in, followed by Dave and his sisters.

“Hello, Andy!” shouted Bob, “ye got here afore I did, did n’t yer? I waited ter ’scort our neighbors to their manshin in the sky, or thereabouts. Folks, this here kid is my

brother Andy. He's a mighty nice feller, an' if yer hain't good ter him yer'll git yer heads punched. Andy, these folks is a-goin' ter live in the room next to our'n, hain't that old persimmons? Here, gals, yer kin set on these cheers. They're all we've got; so the rest of us has got to set a-standin', I reckon!"

"Yes," said Andy; "do sit down and get warm. It's cold in your room. Make yourselves at home here, until you get fixed up."

"Pile in the wood, Andy," said Bob. "We made a heap o' cash ter-day, an' kin live 'ristocratic jist as well as not. I'll light out, now, an' git suthin' ter eat."

"Don't!" said Dave. "We have enough for all in this basket; haven't we, girls?"

"More than enough!" said Kate, uncovering the basket; and soon the five children had become very confidential over their nice lunch of home-made bread, butter, cheese, and cookies.

"Mighty good eatin', this!" exclaimed Bob,

who was doing full justice to the food before him.

"It does taste good," answered Mamie; "and just think! we almost threw it away. It was so heavy to carry, and we didn't think we'd be so hungry."

"Everybody stared at us, too," said Dave. "It made me so ashamed and mad that I wanted to sling every bundle into the middle of the Ohio River."

"Glad the Ohier wa'n't layin' 'round handy 'bout that there time," said Bob, as he helped himself to his fifth slice of bread. "Perfessor," he said, turning to Andy, "how fur do yer 'spect 'tis to the Ohier River?"

Andy hesitated.

"Andy's the feller what kin tell yer whatsoever yer may hanker ter know," explained Bob to Dave. "Andy's eddicated; he's as eddicated as all git out!"

"Oh, Bob!" expostulated Andy, with scarlet cheeks, "I'm not any such thing."

"~~Yes~~, yer be too!" insisted Bob. "Don't let him come any o' his shennanigans on yer, Dave. Andy 's the skeerdest critter I ever seed 'bout lettin' folks know how smart he is. Why, he has went ter school purty near a year, an' his mother teachted him ter home ter boot. What do yer think o' that, sir?"

"It's better than nothing," answered Dave, carelessly.

"Better 'n nothin'!" Bob was disgusted. "Waal, I swan!" he exclaimed, "yer a flabbergasted idjit, if yer don't know that it 's sich a long ways ahead o' nothin' that sich a chap as yer be can't see it! Why, Andy kin read an' write, an' add up figgers, an' he telled me as how he come purty near ter gitten' inter a joggerphy."

To Bob, who had never been to school a day in his life, it seemed that his little companion was wonderfully wise, and he had always entertained a most profound respect for his learning.

"Mamie has studied geography," answered Dave, "and Kate and I have been through one geography and into another. We've been pretty near through one arithmetic too."

"Yer don't say so!" Bob spoke in a tone of wondering surprise. "Is there many like yer, where yer come from?"

"There were some better scholars, and some almost as good as we were," answered Kate, noticing that her brother hesitated. He had been tempted to make his accomplishments appear as great as he could.

Bob sat on one corner of the table, looking across at Andy.

"And yer ain't so smart as I thinked for," he said, as if greatly disappointed. "I knowed yer wa'n't much at hustlin' fer yer grub, an' I knowed as how yer'd squall if yer tickled yer nose with a straw; but I did think as how yer was eddicated powerful high, an' I'd 'a' bet on yer against any boy o' yer size I ever seed fer rattlin' out the larnin' in a pinch."

"But, Bob, Brother Bob!" — Andy's voice trembled a little, — "I told you all the time just how it was, but you would n't believe me."

"Now, Andy, bottle up yer squallin'. Yer need n't think I'm goin' back on yer, fer I hain't. If I can't bet on yer eddication, I can bet on — on — waal, on somethin'."

"I was only joking," said Dave, trying to change the conversation, "when I spoke of throwing to the Ohio River. Of course I knew I could n't do that. I suppose you boys don't know much about joking. In fact, I would n't be surprised if there were a few things that I could teach you," he added in a tone of superiority.

"Yes, my darlin' honey," answered Bob, with a grin, "an' I spects there's jist one er two er thereabouts as I'll be called on ter l'arn you."

"Oh, Dave!" interrupted Kate, in a distressed tone, "oh, I'm so ashamed! Do you know, we never thought to thank the peddler for bringing us to the city?"

“And there’s no knowing when we’ll see him again,” added Mamie.

“I guess we need n’t cry ourselves sick over it,” replied Dave. “I don’t know what we should thank him for. I made an engagement with him to take me, and paid him just as I agreed.”

“But he brought us too, Dave.”

“He would n’t have done so if he could have helped himself, but I was smart enough to get the start of the old fellow. I can’t see why he should be thanked for doing what he was forced to do.”

Then Dave gave his new friends an account of their ride, ending in this way,—

“You see, boys, I knew all the time exactly how it would be. I had paid for my ride, and the old chap knew I meant to have it, and no man would drive off and leave two girls standing in the middle of the road, especially when he had brought them there himself. I studied it all out before we started, and knew just how it would be.”

"Would you have taken your ride and left them, if he hadn't taken them any farther?" asked Andy.

"Of course not, but I didn't intend that things should work that way. I make my plans better than that, and I don't give thanks to any one who has not earned them."

"That's business!" responded Bob, clapping Dave on the shoulder.

The two girls stared at their brother in amazement. He had suddenly developed a trait of character that they had never seen in him before, and they didn't know exactly what to make of it. They said no more on the subject, but began talking with Andy about his home.

"Did you cut those paper curtains?" asked Mamie.

"No, Mother did. They're pretty dirty, I guess. I never thought about it before. Mother used to put new ones up every little while; but if I should take these down I couldn't fix any more like them."

"I'll cut some for you if you'll get a newspaper," said Mamie. "I know how to cut lovely patterns."

"You bet she does!" said Dave, with unnecessary enthusiasm. He felt that his sisters did not quite approve of what he had said about the peddler, and was anxious to set himself right before them.

"How old are you, Andy?" asked Kate, taking no notice of Dave's interruption.

"Almost twelve," answered Andy.

"I'm just past twelve," said Kate, "and Mamie is eleven."

"And we're both larger than you are, Andy!" exclaimed Mamie. "Isn't that funny? and you're a boy too!"

"You've been living in the country," answered Andy, patiently, "and maybe you don't know much about being hungry and cold. I've been that more than anything else. It must make a difference."

It is hard for any boy to be told that he is

smaller than girls of his age, and Andy felt as if the new neighbors were making life hard for him.

"I'm going to pay the rent for that room now, girls," said Dave. "Bob says he will go with me. We'll hurry back."

"You feel bad because Dave did n't thank the peddler, don't you?" asked Andy, when the two boys had left the room.

"Dave does n't mean everything he says," answered Kate, evasively. She did not want to talk about her brother to strangers; neither did she want to own, even to herself, that he had a fault.

"I don't see as it's any of your business, what we think about our own brother," answered Mamie, sharply.

Andy felt that he had said something wrong, and cast about in his mind for some way to better matters. It seemed to him that a confession of a similar trouble would be the best remedy.

"Bob does n't mean everything he says, either,"

he began. "Bob is awfully good, but sometimes he does things that I don't like. It's only little things, though. He won't say 'Thank you;' I believe he'd rather die, and —"

"Now see here, you Andy!" exclaimed Mamie, indignantly; "you need n't begin to compare our brother Andy with that dirty, ragged Bob. He is n't like Bob, and he never has been and he never will be. Do you suppose Dave would go round in hoopskirts and rags, and fiddle for money?"

"Oh, Mamie, don't!" interposed Kate; "that is dreadfully impolite."

"I don't care," answered Mamie; "I don't intend to sit still and hear Dave abused, especially by such a boy as Andy."

"I don't know what she means," said Andy. "I did n't intend to say anything to make her feel bad; and — and — Bob and I would n't earn money that way if we could earn it any other way. But when a fellow's hungry —"

"I'd eat bread without butter first," said

Mamie. "I've been so hungry that I was glad to."

"And we've been so hungry that we chewed bits of a pine board to see if we could n't get a little juice out of it, and we could have bought a loaf of bread for three cents; but we could n't get the three cents."

Mamie stared at him with open eyes, too much astonished to say another word. Andy did not look like a boy who would tell a falsehood, yet she found his story hard to believe. She thought she had been very hungry, but she had known nothing like that.

Just then voices were heard on the stairs. Bob and Dave were returning from their visit to the landlord.



“What would I do if I didn’t have this to keep me warm.” Page 83.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

“DAVE an’ me, we ’ve been a-havin’ a leetle confab,” announced Bob, as the two boys entered the room, “an’ we ’re goin’ ter be all one fam’ly. Mighty queer fam’ly ; don’t yer say so, gals ?”

“Yes, we do,” answered Mamie, very decidedly.

“Uh, huh ! Then we both thinks the same thing,” answered Bob.

“It will be cheaper so,” began Dave.

“Yer kin bet yer life it will,” answered Bob. “I made old Moneybags let us have both o’ these here rooms fer five dollars ; that’s the beginnin’ o’ the good times a-comin’. It made old Moneybags squirm like a caterpillar on a hot stove ter be ’bleeged ter say good-by ter that dollar what he ’d never seed. If we have a few days more like this, Brother Andy, we ’ll

have half the rich 'ristercrats in the city a-squirmin' fit to bust theirselves. Fortin is jist a-chasin' of us now, an' if we don't look out she 's a-goin' ter git us afore we knows it."

Catching up his violin, he began to play and sing, keeping time to his music by a grotesque movement of the body which he called "jig-gling." It could n't have any other name, for no one else ever did anything like it. This is his song, as nearly as it can be given, —

"Come on, Fortin! come along, along, along!
Come on an' grab us, if yer wants us.

We won't run away, run away, away, away;
Fer we wants ter see what kind o' stuff yer made of.

Then hip, hip, hooray!
Hi diddle, diddle de um di,
An' it 's hip, hip, hooray!
Timmi immi tum — "

Bob stopped suddenly, for he saw that his audience was less appreciative than he wished. Dave and his sisters were standing near one of the low windows, earnestly engaged in conver-

sation, in voices so low that Bob could not hear what was said. Andy stood by the stove, looking as if something very bad had happened and he was to blame for it all.

"You see, girls," explained Dave, "it's just this way; we have very little money, and we've got to live close until I can earn some. You can't expect everything tip-top, just at first."

"We don't expect it, Dave," replied Kate.

"I thought we were to have a home of our own, as we had when Mamma was living," said Mamie.

"We are; but —"

"How can we, with *them*?" she interrupted.

"It's only for a time, Mamie," replied Dave. "When we get a start we will live alone, and in a better place than this. But I've been talking with Bob, and I've made up my mind that it is going to be harder to find work than I'd thought for. Bob can help me. He knows the ropes, he says, for he's had to take care of himself ever since he can remember."

“But, Dave, you don’t expect to be like Bob, do you?” There were tears in Kate’s eyes as she asked the question, and her voice trembled. “I think I’d want to die, if you were like him. I don’t know how to say it, but I—I don’t think I like Bob very well.”

In her nervousness she had spoken louder than she intended to, and her words reached Bob’s ears.

“What if yer don’t like me?” he said, straightening himself. “That hain’t no sign that I hain’t wuth likin’, an’ it don’t make me hate myself, not by a consarned jugful. You don’t have ter like me; the p’licemen hain’t a-goin’ ter grab yer, ’cause yer don’t. I don’t like you so ’mazin’ brisk as I might, but I kin mind my own bizness an’ do what’s best fer this here fam’ly,—allee samee.”

“You did n’t understand my sister, I think,” began Dave; but Bob interrupted,—

“Yes, I did too. I hain’t a fool nor idjit, nor a gal baby, nor a donkey. But yer need n’t go

ter palaverin' round about it. I don't keer a busted corn-cob what them gals think 'bout me, an' I wants yer ter hold yer gab till I get done a-tellin' 'em what I think. Gals may be good ter fix up a house," and he turned to the girls, "jist as Dave said; but when it comes ter hustlin' fer a fortin, they hain't wuth shucks. 'Cause yer don't like me, hain't no reason why yer should make it hard fer Dave to take keer of yer; an' it hain't no reason why yer should n't make things kinder purty fer Andy, who is jist as used ter havin' a mother as yer be."

Kate thought a moment, then held out her hand to Bob, —

"I did n't mean for you to hear what I said, Bob, but I can't take it back; not just now, anyhow. I expect I'm all wrong. We did want a home all by ourselves; but if we can't have it just yet, why, we'll try to get along as he wants us to, until we can do better."

"That's just like you, Kate," said Dave,

putting his arm around his sister. "I'll make a nice home for you some day, see if I don't!"

"We must hurry and make our plans," said Kate, "or it will be dark before we know it."

"I'll sweep this dirty floor," said Mamie. "I can't make plans in a pig-pen. Where's the broom, Andy?"

After considerable time spent in searching for it, the broom was found under the straw tick. It was a dilapidated specimen, having seen active service many times when the boys wished to perform gymnastic feats.

"I don't care for plan-making," said Andy, timidly, to Mamie. "If you want me to, I'll help you sweep. I used to help Mother."

"You may move things round, and hold the dust-pan," replied Mamie, graciously; and the work was begun.

The rest of the queer family sat down to count their pennies, and decide what could be purchased.

"We must have a bedstead," called out Mamie, who was trying to sweep under the edges of the straw bed.

"Great guns an' leetle fishes!" exclaimed Bob, "don't yer know a bedstid costs money? We can't eat it when we're hungry, an' it won't be no great help towards a-keepin' of us warm."

"I don't care!" retorted Mamie, "I'm not going to break my back dragging a straw bed over the floor when I want to sweep."

"Yer don't have no call ter drag it 'thout yer hanker arter the job," answered Bob.

"Do you think I'd live here without sweeping under the bed?" demanded Mamie. "Well, I just would n't; let me tell you that, Mr. Bob What's-your-name."

"Jist Bob," responded that individual; "that's all the name I has, an' all I keers fer."

"Well," said Dave, looking toward Bob and speaking hesitatingly, "what about the bedstead, Bob? Do you think we can afford it?"

"I reckon we kin," answered Bob. "In course, we don't want ter see no broken-backed gals a-waltzin' of straw beds over the floor. Let's skip down an' see what we kin git a bed-stid fer afore we continner the plannin'."

Once more the two boys started out, and were soon looking over the contents of a second-hand store.

"Let me do the dickerin'," whispered Bob; "I kin palaver with these chaps better 'n you kin."

"Well," replied Dave, "I'll select the bedstead and you make the bargain. Price this; I'll go to the other side of the store. It might make a difference, you know, if he should see us together."

Dave did not stop to analyze the feeling which prompted him to make the suggestion, but he was more than half ashamed of it.

"What do you want?" gruffly inquired a clerk, walking toward Bob.

"See here, honey!" replied Bob, "yer'll

have ter be politer than that if yer gits any o' my spondulicks."

"Did you come here to make a purchase?" asked the clerk, impatiently.

"Naw!" drawled Bob, "I did n't come ter make nothin'; I come ter dicker fer a bedstid. What's the price o' that wobbly ol' thing?"

"Five dollars, cash."

"Yer don't say so! How'd five dollers, *rags*, suit yer?" asked Bob.

"How does that suit *you*?" demanded the clerk, as he attempted to box Bob's ears.

"Fust-rate — when I gits it," answered Bob, with a grin, as he dodged the blow. "Waal, Mister, this here bloomin' bedstid is too 'rister-cratie. Let's see one what's more humble, if yer pleases."

A cheap pine bedstead was shown him. It was in good repair, but evidently had done service in a house where little children had lived who had not been taught that they must not scratch furniture.

“Waal, I’ll be blowed through a pop-gun!” exclaimed Bob. “Cap’n, what’s yer figgers on this here shaky old straddlebug?”

“A dollar and a half. I sell it cheap, because it is n’t exactly new.”

“No,” answered Bob, sarcastically; “neither is these here shoes o’ mine;” and he stuck out one ragged shoe. “Yer may have this here shoe fer five dollers, Cap’n; I’d ask more, if ’t was new. I’m a-savin’ t’ other one ter sell ter the king.”

“Do you want this bedstead, or not?” demanded the clerk, laughing in spite of himself; for Bob was looking up at him with mischievous eyes, and a most comical expression around his mouth.

“I wants it bad ’nough ter pay yer a dollar,” answered Bob. “If I was you, I’d give it away afore I’d have it a-makin’ faces at all the purty things in this store. Howsomever, I’ll give yer a dollar jist ter be kind o’ ’commodatin’. Here, take yer cash down!” and he held the silver dollar toward the clerk.

“Anything to get rid of you,” answered the clerk, taking the money. “Now take the bedstead and leave!”

“Can’t, till I’ve buyed a kiver er two, an’ — an’ what else, Dave?”

Dave now felt obliged to come from behind the tall cupboard where he had been concealing himself, and let that pompous clerk know that he was the companion of a street boy who was quite good enough for a companion except when he wished to convince others of his own superiority.

“We shall want a straw bed too, I think,” said Dave.

The clerk looked at him keenly, but made no comment; and when the purchases were made he offered to have them delivered, and the boys gave him their address.

“If I’m not mistaken,” he said, “I have some things which came from those rooms a year ago.”

“So!” exclaimed Bob. “When yer gits shet

o' takin' keer of 'em fer nothin', p'r'aps yer'll sell 'em so cheap that I kin take 'em off yer hands. My! but wouldn't Andy go plumb crazy, though! He'd skip around zif a double-barrelled hornet had got stuck on him."

"We'll put the bedstead in this room and let the girls have it," said Dave, when they reached home. "We can take the old straw bed in the other room for us boys to sleep on, and we shall not be obliged to fix that room up just at present, shall we, Katie?"

"N-o-o," answered Kate, slowly. She was beginning to realize that some time might elapse before she and her brother and sister could be together in the home-like rooms which they talked so much about, and her heart was full of a great disappointment. She struggled against it, however, determined not to make Dave uncomfortable.

"Why, Dave," she said, "we can't fix it until we can; that's sure. We've just got to make the best of things as they are."

“And you are just the one who can do it,” answered Dave, kissing her. “You are the best little sister in the world.”

“What about me?” asked Mamie.

“You are best too,” he answered, giving her curly hair a little pull. “I’ll have things nice for you some day, girls, if I have to die doing it.”

Bob had been at the head of the stairs, waiting impatiently for the arrival of the household goods; and just then he came into the room holding his hands to his sides, and twisting himself in a ludicrous attempt to laugh silently yet heartily.

“Oh, jiminy!” he gasped. “Oh, jiminy crickets!! Oh, great summer coons up in the peach-orchard!!! Yer ought ter see the feller what’s a-bringin’ our bedstid. He’s mad ’nough ter bite the head off from a ten-penny nail. He don’t like his job. He’d like ter sell out fer a second-hand mustard plaster. Oh, golly! I b’lieve I’ll bust; but I must git one more squint at that cove afore he gits clear up.”

He went out on the landing, but returned immediately.

"He's a-restin' down there!" he whispered. "I spect he thinks he's purty near dead. Hain't we jist a-slingin' on the style, though! We'll be quality afore we knows it. Jist think o' havin' a man ter tote our duds fer us! Here, slave!" he called, putting his head through the door, "can't yer trot up them there marble steps a leetle livelier?"

The delivery clerk looked up. "Are these things for you?" he asked.

"They be, honey!" replied Bob.

"Well, you can carry this the rest of the way yourself, seeing you're so confounded smart. The rest of them are down by the door;" and he hurried away.

"I was a leetle mite too previous, I reckon," said Bob, looking dolefully down the many flights of steps, at the foot of which were the household goods. "But I don't keer," he added cheerfully; "I'd ruther tote 'em myself, than not ter crowed over that chap."

When the bed was in place and made up, the children thought the room began to have quite a cosey look. While the boys had been making their purchases, the girls and Andy had washed the windows and put up new curtains of newspapers cut in fancy scallops. Fresh papers were also spread on the cupboard shelves, and the long shelf behind the stove.

"I felt like crying, last night," said Andy, "because I could n't sell these papers, but now I'm glad I did n't. It makes me feel kind of warm inside to have the room fixed up so nice."

The boys now secured three soap-boxes, which were to serve them for seats; for Dave had said that the girls must have the chairs. They also bought food enough for supper and breakfast, a little wood, a candle which they put in a battered old candlestick that the boys had used to play with, and a few nails to be driven up for Dave and his sisters to hang their clothes on.

"We hangs *our* duds on ourselves, don't we, Andy?" said Bob; "an' we've seen times when we'd jist as lief had a few more ter hang. But good times is comin' a-gallopin'. We're livin' in 'ristereraticy now, an' don't yer fergit it."

It was quite late when the rooms were arranged, and the children were very tired; yet they sat up a little longer, to talk over the events of the day.

"This is n't so bad as being scolded all the time," said Mamie, sitting on one of the boxes, that she might rest her head on Dave's knee.

"Nor so bad as living where we could n't see one another more than once a week," added Kate, laying her hand on her brother's shoulder.

"If we do get hungry and cold, as Andy tells about, I shall not be sorry that we ran away," said Mamie.

"Neither shall I," added Kate.

"I shall see that you are neither hungry

nor cold," said Dave. "You will have nothing worse than this to bear, and it won't be long before you'll have something better. I'm going to work like a beaver, and we will be very happy together." He meant every word he said.

As Bob and Andy watched the brother and sisters, they felt more alone in the world than they ever had before; and little Andy's heart was sadder when he went into the cheerless room to sleep that night than it had been in the morning when he was cold and hungry. He sobbed a little, but so quietly that the other boys did not hear him.

"I would n't miss Mother so much," he thought, "if I had sisters as Dave has, or even if Bob was my truly brother. It's nice to have somebody care."

CHAPTER SIXTH.

DAVE slept well that night, notwithstanding his strange surroundings; for he had not closed his eyes the night before, and was very tired. When he awoke he was alone. His companions had arisen early, put on their ridiculous costumes, and quietly left the house, hoping to attract the laboring men on their way to work. Experience taught them that they were more likely to receive pennies from a class which knew what poverty meant than from one which did not.

It was with a heavy heart that Andy put on his Japanese costume that morning. It seemed to him as if he would almost rather die than wear it on the street to be stared at and laughed at, and treated with no more consideration by the crowd which gathered around

him than a trained monkey. Bob went down before him, and carefully lifted his hoopskirt to keep it from dragging on the dirty steps.

"I've got ter take keer of it," he said, looking back at Andy with a merry twinkle in his eye, "'cause I don't know when I kin git 'nother one; an' what would I do if it should git colder, an' I did n't have this ter keep me warm? I tell yer, Andy, it would take a cheeky wind ter blow through this here purty thing."

"Oh, Bob!" sighed Andy, "I don't see how you can laugh over it."

"Oh, Andy!" mimicked Bob, "I don't see how yer kin squall over it."

"But, Bob, folks stare at us so, and —"

"In course they stares at us," interrupted Bob. "I'd be 'shamed ter think we went inter this bloomin' bizness if they did n't! We're toggged up in this here hifalutin' style jist a purpose ter git stared at, Sonny, an' don't yer fergit it."

"But they — they — Bob, folks don't like us when we look so."

"Who keers fer that?" answered Bob. "We gits their cash allee samee. Yer can't git rich by squallin' fer some one ter come an' like yer. I spect yer all broke up 'cause yer hain't got no one ter lallygag over yer, like Dave has. That's jist what a feller gits by havin' a mother ter spile him."

Suddenly Bob stepped into an alley, motioning to Andy to follow. Laying his violin on the ground, he turned toward his pitiful-looking companion, his freckled face alive with laughter, and held out his arms.

"Come ter me buzzum, honey!" he said; "come, an' I'll squeeze yer till yer ribs crack. If yer hankerin' after lallygaggin', here's where yer'll git a fust-class article, cheap."

Andy turned, without speaking, and went back into the street, but not until Bob had caught a glimpse of the quivering lips, and the great blue eyes filled with tears which he was

trying to keep from falling. In a moment he was by Andy's side, with all the mischief gone out of his face.

"Kick me, Brother Andy," he said. "Kick me hard, won't yer? I'll stand still. I'd ought ter be kicked plumb ter the 'Lantic Ocean, 'cause I'm a low-down nasty cur what hain't got no sense."

"No, you're not, Bob!" exclaimed Andy, smiling through his tears; "you're just the nicest boy that ever lived."

"I'd rather yer'd kick me than say that," answered Bob, gravely. "Howsomever, if yer won't, p'r'aps we'd better shake, so's ter be sure that everythin' is all right."

The boys shook hands seriously; then walked on a few blocks without speaking.

"Yer see, Brother Andy," said Bob, finally, "folks is willin' ter pay fer what makes 'em laugh, and we've got ter have money. We can't live on likin', no way yer kin fix it; an' 'cordin' ter my ijee, you an' me we've got ter

buckle to an' scrabble fer the cash harder'n ever."

"Why, Brother Bob?"

"'Count o' them there gals. We've got ter help take keer of 'em."

"But there's Dave —"

"That hayseed! He can't do it no more'n he kin fly. He can't do it no more'n I kin go up ter the moon 'thout nary ladder. Don't yer want 'em ter stay, Brother Andy?"

"Oh, yes, don't you, Bob?" replied Andy, eagerly. "They make it seem as if Mother —" Andy stopped suddenly.

"They makes that room look mighty 'rister-catic," said Bob, "an' I don't mind tellin' yer that I likes ter see it so. It's purty near a truly home now, — isn't it, Andy?"

"A truly home has a mother in it, and a father too," answered Andy; "but this is the next thing to it. There has to be girls or women in a home, you know, or it wouldn't be fixed up clean."

“Brother Andy, I’m in fer lookin’ out fer them gals ; what d’yer say to it?”

“I say all right, Brother Bob. I’ll try just as hard as I can, and I’ll wear anything you tell me to, and I’ll try not to care when I’m laughed at.”

“Put yer hand on yer heart!” said Bob, “an’ I’ll kiver mine. Now shake!”

The boys shook hands again, then agreed not to say a word to any of the rest of the family about their new plan.

“Mebbe Dave would n’t hustle very lively, if he knew,” said Bob, by way of explanation.

The two boys had now arrived at their destination, and Bob began to play on the violin. His music was as full of discords as ever, yet it sounded so cheerful in spite of them that many a workman was stopped by it, and after watching the boys a moment, threw them a penny or two before going their way. Andy jumped about even livelier than he had the day before, and Bob’s voice was not still a moment.

When he was not calling to the crowd, he was singing, —

“ We’re a-gittin’ rich, Andy,
Sure as yer born,
Gittin’ as rich as mud in the corn.”

“ Listen ter that, ladies an’ gintlemen! Yer did n’t think I could make up sich a daisy of a song, did yer? Mebbe yer don’t know who I be! Spect I’ll tell yer? Not if I knows myself! But I’ll jist say this: some day my purty songs will be sung by all the ’ristercrats in the world!”

When the boys started for home that morning they carried more money with them than they had earned the day before.

“ We’ll go to a new part o’ the city, next time,” said Bob, “ an’ keep on a-goin’ ter new parts till everybody has seen us; then we’ll dress up in somethin’ else, an’ look wusser nor ever. We’ll look so powerful ugly that folks will screech ’emselves sick jist ter see us.”

Andy tried to assent as eagerly as if he were delighted with the idea. He believed that it was the only way for them to earn a living, since everything else had failed, and there were the girls to care for now, and he had promised to do his part.

“We haven’t got to buy a single thing for breakfast, Bob, did you know it?”

“Yer bet I knows when we’ve got ’nough ter eat laid up ahead,” answered Bob.

“We’ve got lots of money too,” pursued Andy.

“I smell a mice,” announced Bob, by way of reply. “Yer a-thinkin’ o’ suthin’ what yer wants. Let’s have the name of it, quicker’n a bug on a hot coal.”

“We haven’t enough chairs,” said Andy, “and I was thinking—” He hesitated, and Bob finished the sentence.

“We’ll git ’em, Brother, if we’ve got tin ’nough ter do it.”

They went into the second-hand store again,

and bought two wooden chairs, scratched, but otherwise good.

When the boys reached home, breakfast was ready and waiting, and the girls were quite out of patience because they had been kept waiting so long.

"These chairs are for you and Mamie," said Andy, so pleased that his voice trembled. "Dave and Bob can have the others, and I'll have the box. I like the box best, because it has n't any back to get in my way when I want to turn around."

"Hooray fer eatin'!" shouted Bob, seating himself at the table. "I'm that hungry —"

"Oh, boys!" exclaimed Kate, in dismay, "you're not going to sit down to the table with those things on, are you? And you haven't washed your faces nor your hands."

"That is n't where you are to sit, Bob," explained Mamie; "that is Dave's place. He is going to wait on the table, just as he used to when we lived with Mamma, and Kate is going

to do just as Mamma did; so they've got to sit opposite each other. You and Andy are going to sit on that side of the table, and I'm going to sit here. Now, do hurry up and get washed."

"Waal," said Bob, with the greatest good-nature, "if yer so sot, I s'pose there hain't no use a-kickin'; but I spects my hands an' face will be that s'prised they'll want ter hide their-selves. Like as not I'll faint dead away, an' yer'll have ter fan me with the broom."

He slipped off the bustle and hoopskirt, as he spoke, and kicked them into a corner of the room; then went to the box which served as a washstand. Andy, with flaming cheeks, went into the next room to take off his costume, saying as he opened the door,—

"I was so glad about the chairs that I didn't think how I looked."

"I declare, Bob," scolded Mamie, as she picked up his things, "you're the most careless, awful, slouchy boy I ever set eyes on. How do you suppose we're going to keep this

house looking decent when you kick things 'round like this? Andy went into the other room to take his things off."

A pleased look came into Bob's eyes.

"Was that the proper caper?" he asked. "But I might of knowed it was, 'cause Brother Andy he 's a borned 'ristercrat."

"There are some nails in the hall for you boys to hang your caps on," explained Mamie. "Each one of you must have a nail of your own, and —"

"Oh, summer coons up in the peach-orchard!" groaned Bob, holding his hands to his face.

"What is the matter?" asked Kate, in alarm.

"Oh, it makes my teeth ache, — so many hang-ups an' pick-ups an' wash-ups an' dress-ups!" His eyes danced with fun as he removed his hands from his face. "Say, gals," he pleaded, "can't I eat now? I'm that hungry I'm all caved in."

The children seated themselves at the table

as Mamie told them to. It was evident that she meant to be obeyed in all housekeeping affairs. It was the first time Bob had sat at a table like that; and he began to think that now he was surely living in a home such as he had heard other boys tell about. Clean newspapers were used for a tablecloth, and the few dishes were put on to look as nicely as possible. Bob noticed them at once.

“Golly!” he said, “them there dishes look zif they was scared of each other! I’ll bet they’ll run purty quick.” As he spoke he reached for a biscuit.

“Oh, Bob!” exclaimed Mamie, “you mustn’t reach for things that way. You must wait for Dave to change plates with you.”

“What for?” asked Bob. “My plate’s good ’nough fer me; hain’t his’n good ’nough fer him?”

Just then Dave put a little piece of sausage and a baked potato on the plate before him, and handed it to Kate, who returned hers.

"See, Bob!" said Mamie, "that's the polite way to do it."

"Yer don't say," said Bob, laughing heartily. "Oh, my grandmother's cat's hind-foot, but I b'lieve I've got ter bust this time, sartin sure! Sich tomfoolery I never seed afore. Quick, Dave, I'm a-bustin' ter swap plates with yer!" and he laid his head on the table and laughed until tears ran down his cheeks.

Dave was inclined to be angry; he did n't like to be laughed at, even though he knew there was no reason why he should be. Kate was amused at Bob's ignorance, and Andy was puzzled. He hardly knew what to think about it. He thought Dave must know what he was about, but his mother never did any such thing. Mamie was indignant.

"What an idiot you are, Bob!" she said scornfully. "I don't believe you know a single thing!"

"Guess yer hit it right, this time," answered Bob, wiping his eyes on his sleeve; "but I

reckin I'll git a ijee purty soon if yer tongue don't break off. Yis, my son, here's yer plate," he said, passing his plate to Dave; "but I can't see no reason fer yer tradin' when mine's empty an' yourn hain't."

After breakfast, Dave said he would go out and look around for work. He made the announcement with a very pompous air, which brought Bob to his feet instantly.

"This here is Dave afore goin' arter a job," he said, holding his head very far back, and marching around the room with his hands in his pockets and his knees quite stiff; "an' now I'll be Dave when he gits back." He now held his head on his breast, his hands hung limp by his side, and he leaned against the wall as if too weak to stand alone.

"Perhaps you think I won't get work," said Dave, laughing at Bob's funny representation.

"Not jist at fust. Andy an' me, we've tried it."

"I think it will be somewhat different with

me," answered Dave, confidently. "Good-by, girls."

"Remember what we talked about, Dave," called Kate, after him.

"I will," promised Dave.

While they were waiting for Bob and Andy to come to breakfast, the three children had talked very earnestly about their new life.

"You must try to get nice work," said Kate, "something that you will not be ashamed of. Why, Dave, I would n't have you earning money as Bob and Andy do for anything in the world. I believe it would pretty near kill me. It's all right enough for them, of course; but for you — I did n't know how nice you were, Dave, until I saw you with them."

"I'm not half so nice as my sisters," said Dave; "that's one thing I'm sure of."

"It's so pleasant for us all to be here together, isn't it?" asked Mamie. "It seems like a hateful dream, the life at Uncle John's and Aunt Lucy's."

After Dave had gone, Bob told Andy that it was time to go to work again.

"If yer wants anythin', gals," he said, "yer 'd better tell us afore we go. We've got plenty o' cash what hain't doin' nothin'."

"Oh, bring us some apples," said Mamie, "and we 'll bake them for dinner. I love baked apples."

"No," said Kate, "apples cost too much; we can't afford them. We must be careful, Mamie, until Dave gets to earning lots of money."

"All right!" said Mamie; "then don't bring anything but a loaf of bread and a few potatoes and a tiny little piece of butter. You buy things now, and when Dave gets work he'll buy everything for a while."

"Golly!" said Bob, as he and Andy started downstairs, "it's lucky we're in a business what pays, Brother Andy. What would them gals say if they could n't have nothin' but bread, an' not much o' that?"

When Bob returned he brought all that

Mamie had asked for, besides a little liver to fry, and five nice apples.

"Them apples is 'cause I don't do things 'ristercratic," he explained. "I can't do em jist at first, no more'n a pig could live in a glass parlor 'thout havin' his head cut off."

Bob suddenly developed a love for work that surprised Andy. He had never seemed to care to exert himself until forced to do so by hunger or cold. Now the rent was paid a month in advance, there was food enough for dinner, and almost wood enough to last all day, and the money they had earned before breakfast was not all gone; yet Bob was not willing to rest a minute.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

As Dave went slowly down the street, wondering where he would be most likely to find work, he was startled by a sound slap on the shoulder, and a familiar voice sounded in his ears.

"Hello, Bub!" it said, "I'll be squashed to smithereens if I hain't found you just when I was thinking 'bout you."

Turning, Dave saw the old peddler who had brought him to the city. "I thought you were on your way to the country long ago," he said.

"I calkerlated on going, but can't see a man I'm looking for till to-morrow; so I've got a little idle time on my hands."

"By the way," said Dave, "the girls are fretting because we all forgot to thank you for bringing us —"

“Oh, that’s all right!” interrupted the peddler. “Where are you going? I might trot around with you if you don’t mind.”

“I’d be glad to have you,” answered Dave, though not very warmly, for he did not quite know whether he was pleased or not. “I’m looking for work, but I have n’t seen one sign of ‘Boy wanted’ since I started.”

“I know where you could get a place as office-boy. The pay wouldn’t be much at first, but you’d have a chance to work up. Likely you’d get six dollars the first month.”

“Only six dollars for a whole month’s work!” exclaimed Dave. “No, I thank you.”

“But you’d be getting experience,” urged the peddler; “then the chance to work up hain’t nothing to be sneezed at.”

“We could n’t live on it,” replied Dave. “There are three of us who must eat, and our rent is two dollars and a half a month.”

“Suppose I pay your rent two months; don’t you think you could manage then? You could

pay the money back when you have it to spare. You don't know anything but farm work, and you can't expect to get big pay until you do. I know boys who would jump at a chance to work for Gray Brothers, even if they did n't get paid a cent for three months."

"Their time can't be worth very much," answered Dave.

"They know that it pays a boy to work for a reliable firm, especially firms who employ only boys who have good habits; for they can get a position five times as easy afterward."

"I'm much obliged to you for taking so much interest in me," said Dave, "but really I think I can do better than to work for six dollars a month. I know I could if I should start into business for myself."

"Into business for yourself!" repeated the peddler. "Presto and hoe-cake! What could you do?"

"Oh, I know what I could do," answered Dave, evasively. "I have n't said anything

about it yet, because I know the girls would make a great fuss. They won't be satisfied unless I get into the nicest kind of work. I suppose they think I could work for the governor just as well as not. Oh, here it says 'Boy wanted;' let's go in."

"Do you want a boy, sir?" and Dave took off his cap.

"Yes, for the office. Ever been office-boy?"

"No, sir, but I think I could learn to do your work."

"How much do you expect a month?"

"Twelve dollars," answered Dave, glancing triumphantly at his companion, for he thought he was sure of the situation. "Of course I shall want more when I have learned the work."

The man laughed, and looked at Dave keenly.

"I will give you nothing at all the first week," he said, "for you will be more trouble than you are worth. If you stick to the work, I will give you a dollar and a half a week for

the rest of the month; after that, two dollars a week if you learn well. You might be able to earn ten dollars a month after you had worked three or four months; if so, you'd get it."

"But, sir," said Dave, "I have two sisters to support, and —"

"Do you intend to beg for them?" answered the man, sharply.

"No, sir, I do not."

"If you demand more money than you are able to earn because of them, what else would you be doing? I offer you a position and a chance to work up in a good business; you may accept or not, as you choose."

"I don't want the place," answered Dave. "My time is worth more to myself than you offer for it."

"Seems to me you are making a deep-tinted, black-and-blue mistake," said the peddler, as the two left the office. "When I was a youngster, if I had been given two such chances

as you've had to-day, I'd have taken one of them. Then, 'stead o' peddling, I should now be as slick-looking as that chap we've just been talking to."

Dave could hardly keep from smiling when he glanced at his rough-looking companion and thought of the gentleman they had just left. "I guess it would take more than a good position to make him slick-looking," he thought.

"You'll change your opinion, Mr. Cobb," he said, "when I prove that I'm right. If a fellow does n't consider his own time worth anything, no one else is going to make him change his mind."

Dave asked for work in a great many places that day, but with no better success. He could not find any one who was willing to pay him more than they thought his services were worth, and no one had so flattering an idea of his ability as he had himself. He was also told a number of times that a boy without experience was more trouble than he was

worth, and they did n't want him at any price. By noon Dave was very tired and completely discouraged, although he would not admit it.

As they walked along together, Mr. Cobb asked a great many questions about their household arrangements, and finally announced his intention of going home with Dave to dinner. Stepping into a bakery near by, he bought as much food as they could all eat in a day, saying that it would cost something wherever he took dinner, and he might just as well eat with them.

The girls gave him a cordial welcome, and he was soon on good terms with Bob and Andy. After dinner Mr. Cobb took from his pockets a paper of pins, one of needles, a few buttons, a comb, several spools of thread, two strings of beads, and some brass watch-chains, which he gave to the children. Then he bade them good-by, and asked Dave to accompany him a little distance.

When Dave returned, he brought six cups

and saucers, with plates to match. They were of cheap ware, but gayly colored; and the children thought they had never seen such beautiful dishes. When they had grown somewhat tired of admiring them, Kate thought to ask her brother what success he had had.

"If there's any work to be found," said Dave, "I wish you'd find it."

"Oh, Dave! did n't you hear of one single thing?" Kate had not meant to show her disappointment quite so plainly. She had told Mamie after Dave went away that she didn't really think he would find work the first day, and she had tried to convince herself that she believed what she was saying.

"Not a thing," answered Dave, pretending to examine his new watch-chain very closely; "that is, anything worth mentioning. Folks don't seem to know that a fellow with a family on his hands can't work as cheap as if he had no one but himself."

Dave thought that if he gave the girls a little

hint that they were to be quite a care, they would more readily agree to the plan which he hesitated to propose.

"Well," said Mamie, "what are you going to do now?"

"I don't hardly know," answered Dave, slowly.

"What do you think you'll do?" persisted Mamie, who thought that one so very smart as her brother must know of at least half-a-dozen respectable ways to make a fortune.

"I've thought of two or three things," answered Dave, evasively, "but I don't know whether any of them will amount to anything. One thing is certain, — if I don't get work pretty soon, we'll be in a hard row of stumps. I'll have to do something, if it isn't quite so nice."

This last remark was made with a sidelong glance at Kate, who stood looking out of the window. He was determined to do as he pleased, but he wanted the consent of the sisters beforehand.

Just then there was a sound of footsteps coming slowly up the stairs, and the other boys came into the room bringing as much wood as they could carry.

"Look a-here!" shouted Bob; "don't that make yer eyes water? An' we've got more o' the darlin' stuff, hain't we, Andy? We piled wood fer a feller what did n't want ter do it fer hissself, an' we worked so powerful that he got stuck on us an' give us a lot of it fer pay. Come on, Dave, yer've got ter help waltz it upstairs. No, Andy, don't yer come; yer've worked till yer plumb beat out."

It was evident from Bob's behavior that he now considered himself the head of the family. "I'm a-thinkin'," he had said to Andy, when they were piling wood,— "I'm a-thinkin' as how the whole caboodle of 'em will starve plumb ter death if we don't hustle."

"I guess they would any way, if it wasn't for you," Andy had answered. Then Bob became angry.

“Andy,” he said, “if yer talk like that a great sight more, I’ll lam yer! I ain’t a-goin’ ter have yer sayin’ as how yer hain’t doin’ nothin’, when yer knows I could n’t do a thing with my fiddlin’ if ’t wa’n’t fer yer dancin’. An’ sich dancin’! It grows purtier an’ purtier every time yer tries it, an’ it’s so purty now that it makes my eyes water ter look at yer; it do, fer a fact.”

“Oh, Bob! you know you’re fooling,” Andy had answered, greatly pleased with the compliment.

“Brother Andy,” and Bob’s voice was very serious, “I hain’t a-foolin’ no more’n I was when I licked that feller what tried ter steal the knack o’ yer dancin’. When he tries ter mock yer ag’in, it will be when he gits over the lickin’.”

That night Dave and Andy went to sleep almost as soon as they touched the bed, but Bob lay awake, with one hand under the corner of the straw bed where his fingers could touch

two nice bananas which he had put there early in the evening. They had been given him by a young lady w^h horse he had held, and he had hurried home with them, thinking to give them to the girls; but when he reached the landing he had heard Dave's voice in the living-room, and had gone into the other room and hid the bananas under the straw bed. All during the evening he had tried to find some good excuse for getting Dave and Andy out of the room for a little while, but in vain. He hoped they would go to sleep before the girls did, and planned to get up softly and hand the bananas to the girls through a crack in the door. But Dave spent a little time showing Andy how to turn a handspring, and when the boys finally went to sleep Bob felt sure that the girls must be sleeping also.

"It's jist my tarnal luck," he thought. "Now I've got ter lay here all night with the smell o' them blessed bananys a-ticklin' my nose fit ter kill, an' I know I can't never do it. My

mouth is a-waterin' that fast, now, that I have ter keep a-swallerin' jist like I was a-drinkin'. I'll be drowned afore mo' 'n' if I keeps on this here way."

He made a motion as if to take the bananas from beneath the straw bed, but instantly drew his hand back.

"No, Bob," he whispered, "yer'll be a idjit if yer does that. If yer'd git them bananys any closter ter yer nose, yer could n't keep 'em from a-gittin' inter yer mouth no way yer could fix it."

He took his hand away and smelled of his fingers.

"Golly ter griddle-cakes!" he exclaimed softly, "they makes my paw smell like posies. I never had but one banany as I knows on, an' I can't jist remember what way it tasted. It don't seem zif them gals orter have 'em, 'cause I could n't git no chance ter give 'em away when I wanted ter, an' they said as how they had et mince-pie. I never had none o' that."

He put his hand under the straw bed again and took out the bananas, then sat up in bed and smelled of them.

"Oh, Mister!" he said, "I'm a-goin' ter eat yer; hain't yer glad of it, yer darlin' bananys? I be."

He started to peel one of them, but hesitated.

"When that peddler feller come," he said, "them gals give one o' their baked apples ter him 'thout sayin' nothin', an' then they divided t' other apple atween 'em. If I can't do what gals can, I'll kick myself all over this hull city an' back ag'in,—yes, an' back ag'in."

He put the bananas back, and stood up; then moved quietly away from the bed, so as not to disturb his companions.

"I does n't want 'em ter open their blinkers, 'cause I'm a-goin' ter do what they could n't do 'thout gittin' killed. I'm jist a-goin' ter see if I can't kick a leetle sense inter myself."

He went at his strange employment as if he expected to be paid for doing it well, and suc-

ceeded in making enough noise about it to awaken both of his companions.

"What's up?" asked Dave, in alarm.

"Nothin'," answered Bob, going back to bed, "I was jist gittin' a leetle warmed up."

In two minutes he was sleeping soundly, and the bananas were untouched.

The next morning Dave started out as soon as he had eaten his breakfast, telling his sisters that he was going to try again to find work. Andy was so stiff from working so hard to help pile wood the day before that he could scarcely walk when he first got up, and went earlier than Bob to the place where he was to dance that morning, that he might go more slowly at first.

"Yer'll be all right when yer've walked a bit," Bob had said. "I've been that there way lots o' times, when I had ter sleep out doors 'thout nothin' ter keep out the cold. I reckon that when a feller feels that way it's 'cause all the ile in his body gits settled in one place. If yer walks 'round a spell it will run into yer

j'int's where it ought ter be, an' yer'll be as frisky as a flea."

So Andy started off slowly, hoping to have the oil back in his joints before Bob caught up with him. As soon as he had reached the second landing of the long flight of stairs, Bob carried the bananas to the girls.

"Here, gals," he said, "they 're fer you. Eat 'em afore any of us gits back, or yer'll git yer heads yanked off close down ter yer heels."

"They're awfully nice, Bob," said Mamie. "Where did you get them?"

"Buyed 'em," answered Bob, yielding to the temptation to put himself in what seemed to him would be a very manly light.

"You ought not to have done it," said Kate. "They look just splendid, but you ought not to spend your money in that way, when we're all so poor."

"Can't I give Dave just a little taste?" asked Mamie. "He likes bananas as well as we do, and he hasn't had one since Mamma died."

"Can't help it," answered Bob, decidedly. "You gals has got ter eat 'em all by yer own selves. If yer don't, I'll quit a-combin' of my hair an' a-tradin' plates with Dave."

Bob left the room without giving the girls time to reply, and hurried downstairs.

"What shall we do?" asked Kate. "It does n't seem quite right to eat every mouthful and not give Dave any, does it?"

"No," answered Mamie, "but you know what Bob said. We're making him a great deal more respectable, and we don't want him to go back any. I think it is our duty to eat these bananas just as he told us to."

And they ate the fruit without once thinking to divide with the noble little fellow who had given it to them, and whom they considered so far beneath themselves.

When Bob reached the foot of the stairs, he found Dave waiting for him.

"Yer comin' back a'ready?" he asked.

"I haven't been anywhere yet," answered

Dave. "I've been waiting here for you. What made you so slow?"

"Business," answered Bob. "I allers tends ter my own business."

"And I waited to see you because I want to talk business with you. I have thought of something that will be worth five thousand dollars to both of us. What's your hurry? Can't you stop to talk a minute?"

"I spect Andy 'll think I hain't never comin'."

"Who cares for Andy? It won't kill him to wait, I guess."

"I care fer Andy, an' nobody won't never know whether it will kill him or not," replied Bob, indignantly. "I'm a-goin' ter ketch up with him, an' I'm a-goin' ter run till I git there, an' if yer wants ter talk business yer kin come along with me an' talk a-runnin'."

Dave felt as if he were conferring a great favor on Bob, by proposing to go into business with him, and that the ragged boy ought to be

made to realize it. It was n't at all in keeping with the dignity and importance of the occasion for him (Dave) to unfold his cherished plan while racing up the street with a ragged boy wearing a bustle and hoop-skirt, and carrying a violin under his arm. Yet there was no other way. Bob was always at work, or looking for work, during the day, and Dave did not care to discuss the plan in the evening before the girls. Besides he did not want to wait for a more fitting opportunity. Every moment was precious, now that fortune seemed so near him. Before Bob had run half a block Dave was by his side, keeping step with him, while he eagerly unfolded his plan, and so much in earnest that he did not heed the smiles of amusement on the lips of the people they passed.

"What do you think of it?" asked Dave, when he had finished. "Tell me quick before we get up with Andy."

"Not much," answered Bob. "I don't make no bargains 'thout Andy."

"Oh, pshaw! that's silly. You know very well that he'll do just what you say."

"Yer low-down, ornery hairpin!" exclaimed Bob, indignantly. "D'yer think I'd make bargains fer Brother Andy jist 'cause I knows he wouldn't kick 'bout 'em? What do yer take me fer, anyhow? I don't go inter no business what Andy don't know about aforehand, an' don't yer fergit it."

"Of course," said Dave, in a conciliatory tone; "I didn't ask you to go into the business without asking Andy. I only wanted you to tell me what you think about it."

"I'll tell yer that arter I've talked with Andy, not afore."

"All right then," answered Dave, cheerfully, seeing that nothing more was to be got from Bob. "I guess I'll go now, and see what sort of arrangements can be made. By the way, Bob, don't mention it before the girls just at present, will you?"

"Not if yer don't want me ter."

“And tell Andy not to. I’ll tell you why some other time. Good-by.”

“I b’lieve that Dave’s a porkypine what p’int’s so many ways ter one’t that nobody can’t tell which way he’ll shoot,” said Bob to himself, as he watched Dave walking down the street. “I don’t hanker arter him bad ’nough ter want ter eat him up, an’ that’s a kickin’ fact. But them two gals, they ’pear ter be awful stuck on him. Mamie reckoned she’d up an’ die if he got hurted, an’ Kate she said she wouldn’t never git over it. I spect that last would be a heap wusser nor dyin’. Waal, they fixes things up powerful ship-shape, an’ Andy is that tickled ’bout it that he purty near busts, an’ I hain’t mad ’bout it myself. It’s nice ter eat ter a table, an’ be like other ’ristercrats, an’ I kin git ’long with Dave somehow.”

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

A LITTLE more than two months have passed since Dave unfolded his plan to Bob and Andy and they agreed to try it. The boys are now in business for themselves on a corner of one of the busiest streets in the city. The place is a favorite resort for hackmen, idle men, drivers of express-wagons, and newsboys, and is passed by many of the business men on their way to their offices ; but ladies avoid it, whenever possible. Most of them prefer going a block or two out of their way to being obliged to pass so many rough men.

A stand, made by nailing four straight sticks to a shoe-box, is placed on this corner ; and from it Dave has sold tobacco, cigars, newspapers, stationery, fruit, confectionery, — anything that

he could sell and make a profit on. He has a keen eye for bargains, and rarely loses on his purchases. His ability in that respect has given Bob a greater amount of respect for him than he had at first. The new business has brought in money, and Dave's good opinion of himself has not lessened. It angers him to receive no more than a passing glance from the fine-looking business men who pass his stand. He has learned to know most of them by sight, and has heard many stories of the way they began life from the idle men around him, who have nothing better to do than gossip.

"They look at me just as if I didn't amount to anything," he says to himself; "and why should they? When they began life they were just as poor as I am. If ever I get rich,—and I will,—I'll make every one of them sorry for having treated me so." There is hardly a day when some such thought does not go through his head.

Dave looks at the big clock on the post-office ;

it is a quarter to twelve, and Bob and Andy will soon be coming, for they are very punctual. They always appear in time to attract the men as they pass on their way to and from their work. Dave makes a great many sales at such times, for the two boys never fail to draw a crowd around his stand. The boys agreed to divide equally all money taken in at such times more than the cost of the goods sold. Dave keeps for himself all he takes in when alone, and Bob and Andy keep what they earn in other parts of the city.

On this particular day two queer little figures might have been seen coming toward Dave's stand, soon after he glanced at the clock.

"Golly!" said Dave, a broad grin overspreading his face as he caught sight of them, "the old rag-peddler has outdone himself this time, sure as shooting."

"Mawnin', sah," said the larger of the two, touching his tall white hat; "hope I sees you well, sah."

“Oh, Bob!” answered Dave, laughing heartily, “you don’t know how awfully funny you look.”

“Hope so, sah!” said Bob, gravely. “Hope ter bust the whole crowd ter-day, sah.”

Bob wore a ragged black coat that touched the ground when he walked, and a tall white hat that looked as if it had been through some hard places. He was painted black, and wore a white wig and long white beard, which had been sold to the rag-peddler by a bankrupt actor. Andy was dressed to look like a little old colored woman. He wore a gay little shawl, a shabby calico dress, and a huge green sun-bonnet, which had not been starched since it was last washed,—a very long time ago. He was glad of that, however, for it hid his face better than it would if stiffer. Although Andy had been obliged to dress in some such way for more than two months, it was just as hard for him as it had been at first. He never complained now, and never cried when there

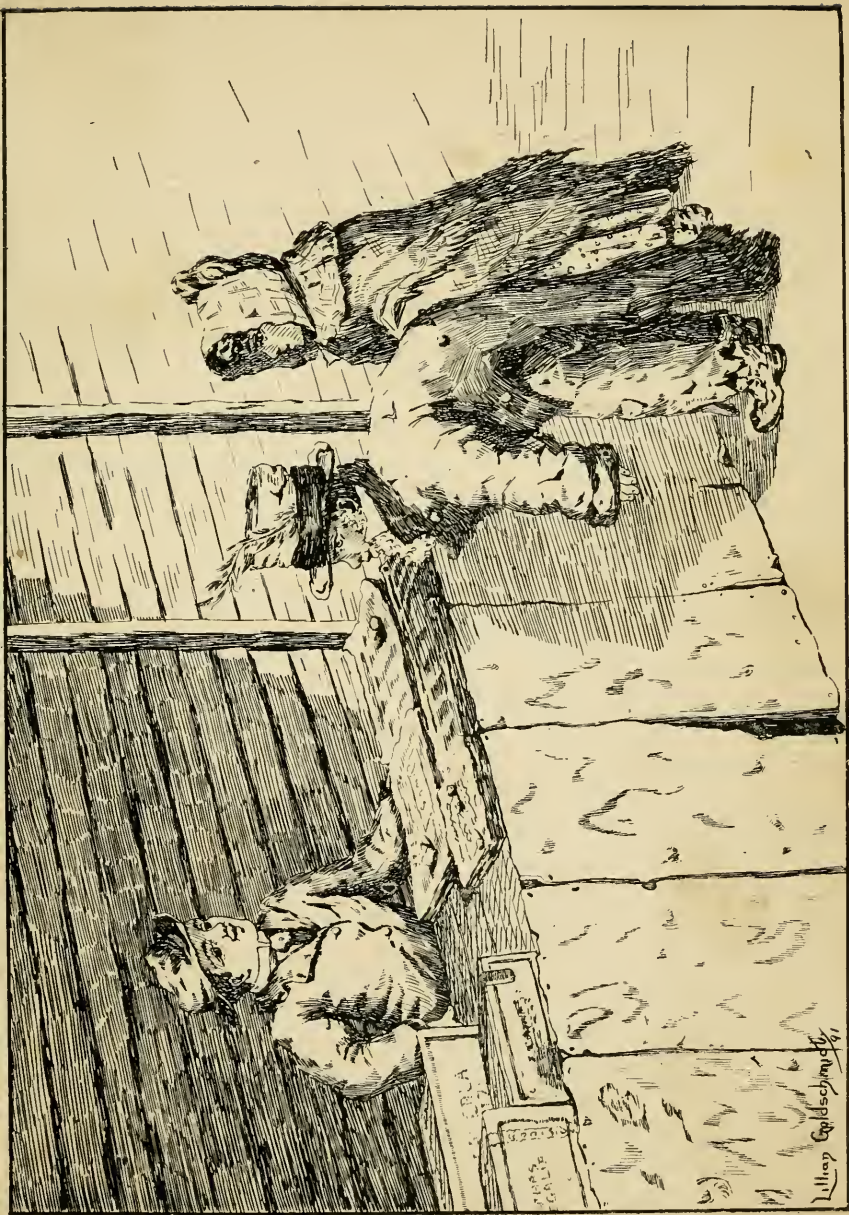
was danger of being discovered, but he was very unhappy, and sometimes he wished he could die and be buried where no one could see him.

“Git, ole womern!” called Bob, as he began playing a negro melody. “Dance yer purtiest! That’s the way ter hoe it down. Look at that, gentlemen; did yer ever see sich daisy kickin’? That’s my ole womern, gentlemen. I brung her here from Alabamy in Ireland. There’s plenty jist like her where she come from,—all but the dancin’; I never seed no one else who could git ’round like she kin. Go it, ole womern! hi, yip! be keerful ’bout showin’ yer stockin’s!”

There was now a big crowd around the boys, and Bob began to sing,—

“Oh, here’s where yer gits yer niggers,
Hi, yip! hi, yip! hi, yip!
Oh, we’re two bloomin’ niggers,
Hi, yippity, yippity, yip.”

Bob suddenly ceased singing, and tried to attract Dave’s attention without stopping the



music. He had spied Kate and Mamie coming toward them, and they did not yet know what sort of business their brother was in.

"It can't be helped now," thought Bob; "but, great American thunder in a leetle English cook-stove! won't Dave be broke up over it!"

"Why, Dave! what are you doing here?"

Bob saw the girls standing close beside their brother, and heard Kate's surprised exclamation. Dave started as if he had been struck; he had kept his secret from them so long that he had begun to think they need never find it out, at least not until after he had succeeded in getting into something better.

"What are you here for?" he asked angrily, as he turned toward them. "Didn't I tell you this wasn't a decent street for you to walk on?"

"We got lost," began Mamie; but Kate interrupted her, —

"If it isn't a decent place, what are you here for?"

The crowd of men were regarding them curiously, and Dave was so filled with anger and shame that he lost all control of himself.

"Go home and mind your own business!" he commanded. "If you stay here another minute, I'll go where you'll never see me again."

Mamie began to cry softly to herself, and Kate took hold of her hand.

"Come, Mamie," she said, "don't cry before all these people, dear. Let's go home. Be sure to be in time for dinner, Dave."

She looked at her brother as she spoke, and tried to smile; but her lips trembled pitifully, and she was paler than he had ever seen her before. He could not forget it after she had left him, and he was so worried and confused and unhappy that he made all manner of mistakes in his business.

“Come, boys,” he said at last, “let’s call it done for to-day. I—I don’t feel very well.”

“Them gals give him a headache!” yelled a newsboy, jeeringly.

“Mighty nice gals!” began another; but Dave started toward him so threateningly that he hurried out of his way.

“I’ll thrash the first one who says a word about my sisters!” said Dave.

Then he took what was left of his stock in trade, and the three boys went to the rag-peddler’s room, where they were allowed to store it over night or when Dave was at home. Bob and Andy had also formed a habit of going there to dress in their queer costumes, and to make themselves presentable before going home. The old rag-peddler—whom, by the way, they called Jake—had become greatly interested in the boys, and liked to have them in his dingy room. Andy was particularly pleased with the new arrangement, because

he need not be so often seen by Kate and Mamie in a garb that made his cheeks burn with mortification.

"I—I don't think I'll go home just yet," said Dave. "You tell the girls I'll be there pretty soon. There is some business that I've got to attend to right away."

"All right!" said Bob, winking at Andy. "We'll be glad ter see yer when yer gits there; that is, if we're there ourselves. We've got ter git ter work ag'in purty early."

"Why have we?" asked Andy, as they started toward home.

"We hain't," was the answer; "but I spect we'd better. Dave's afeard he's got ter catch mosey when he gits home, an' he'd a leetle ruther we wouldn't be there. Great fish-hooks! but didn't them gals look awful when they seed him! Kate's eyes looked jist like burned holes in a blanket; an' Mamie, she squalled like a thunder-storm."

"I know how they felt," said Andy.

“How d’ye know? Have yer been a couple o’ gals onc’t upon a time?”

“No — ” began Andy.

“Glad ter hear it!” interrupted Bob. “If yer had been a gal onc’t, yer wouldn’t be wuth much now. Gals hain’t wuth a cent when it comes ter hustlin’ fer spondulicks.”

The girls had said very little about their new trouble while they were getting dinner, but each knew that the other was thinking of it, and each dreaded to mention it first. Bob and Andy had hardly left the room before they heard Dave coming up the stairs.

“Hello!” he said, as he came into the room; “guess I’m late. Have the boys eaten dinner?” He tried to speak as if nothing unusual had happened, but did not succeed very well.

“They have just gone,” answered Kate, with averted face. Mamie had kept his dinner warm for him, and now set it before him. Her eyes blazed angrily, but Dave had a feel-

ing that she would not be so hard to talk to as Kate, who was pale and sad-looking, and who he knew felt worst when she said least. He had never before noticed how much she looked like their mother, and he felt almost as uncomfortable in her presence as he could have done had his mother been there to add her disapproval of his conduct to his sisters'.

Mamie set his dish of soup before him with such energy that a little of it splashed on his hand.

"I wish you'd be more careful," he said, wiping it off, and trying to look as injured as if it had really burned him.

"I'm careful enough for any one like you," she retorted.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "I guess I'm as good as you are."

"Yes, you are; you're nothing but a low, rough boy, and we're your sisters, living in an attic with boys who are not much better than beggars. And worse still, we've got to stay here

as long as we live, unless we can find some way of taking care of ourselves. We were not so low down and awful when we were living in the country. Whatever happened there, we never had to be ashamed of our brother. What do you suppose Mamma would think if she were here? She used to call you her 'little gentleman.' What would she call you now? Her thief, I presume."

"Oh, Mamie, Mamie, please don't talk like that! You forget that he's Mamma's Dave yet."

Dave turned very white when Mamie used the word "thief," and pushed his bowl of soup away from him. He cleared his throat once or twice, as if to speak; then crossing his arms on the table, he buried his face in them. Did the girls suspect? He wished he knew why Mamie used that ugly word.

Dave had two boxes: in one he kept the money taken in when he was alone; in the other he put that which was to be divided with

Bob and Andy. Several times he had dropped a nickel into the wrong box when he was sure that neither Bob nor Andy was looking. He was sorry for it afterward, and at night, when he lay awake thinking about it, he promised himself that he would not do it again, and that he would manage to make it right with them the next day; but he had so many ways for his money that he never felt as if he could make up that which he had taken, and several times since then he had taken more. Now, as he sat there with his face buried in his hands, he was wondering just how much the girls knew, and if they despised him utterly. Presently he felt Kate's hand resting lightly on his head.

"What made you do — that sort of work, Dave?" she asked.

"Because I couldn't find anything else to do which would bring in money enough to keep us from starving."

"But why did n't you tell us the truth? You said you were working in a store."

“No, I did n’t say any such thing.”

“You said you were a clerk.”

“And so I am. I am not to blame if you thought I was in a store. I did n’t say I was.”

“When you knew what we thought, why did n’t you set us right? You would have done so if you ’d been honest,” said Mamie.

“Don’t talk that way, Mamie,” said Kate. “Dave is honest. We made a mistake, I think. We did n’t know how hard it was to get work.”

“That’s just it, Kate,” said Dave. “I am going to get into something better, just as quick as I can. I look around every day for something; but it would n’t be wise for me to give this up until I find it. We could n’t live if I did.”

“I think we’ve been nearer wrong than you, Dave,” said Kate. “We ought not to have been so hateful that you did n’t like to tell us what you were doing. If you’ll forgive us, we’ll try to understand things better after this, won’t we, Mamie?”

Mamie assented somewhat reluctantly, for she could n't really see wherein she had done wrong. But she didn't enjoy a contention unless she was chiefly conspicuous in it herself; so she concluded to be forgiven, and the three children had a nice long talk about what they would do when Dave found better work to do.

When Bob and Andy returned, they found Dave sitting by the stove, with one arm thrown around Kate, and Mamie sitting on a box at his feet, with her head resting against his knee. Bob just glanced at them, and then pushed Andy into the next room, without giving him time to get warm.

"Brother Andy," he said, "I jist wanted ter tell yer that gals is queer critters! I reckoned I might fergit ter tell yer, if I didn't do it ter onc't. Gals is mighty queer critters; that's jist what they be."

CHAPTER NINTH.

THE weeks passed quickly, and Dave was still selling cigars, tobacco, and confectionery at his stand on the corner. For a few days after the events narrated in the last chapter Dave had looked for a position where he could work up, but with the determination not to accept a place unless he could be paid according to his own idea of his worth. Of course he was not successful. His sisters were ready with sympathy and encouragement, but after the first few days Dave became irritable, and showed very plainly that he did not care to be questioned. Once he went so far as to tell them that he wished he had come to the city without them.

“You’re enough to make a fellow crazy,” he said. “I could get a nice place easily enough

if I did n't have any one but myself to support ; but of course you never think of that."

He left the room soon after making that speech, and shut the door with a bang, and the girls were silent a long time afterward.

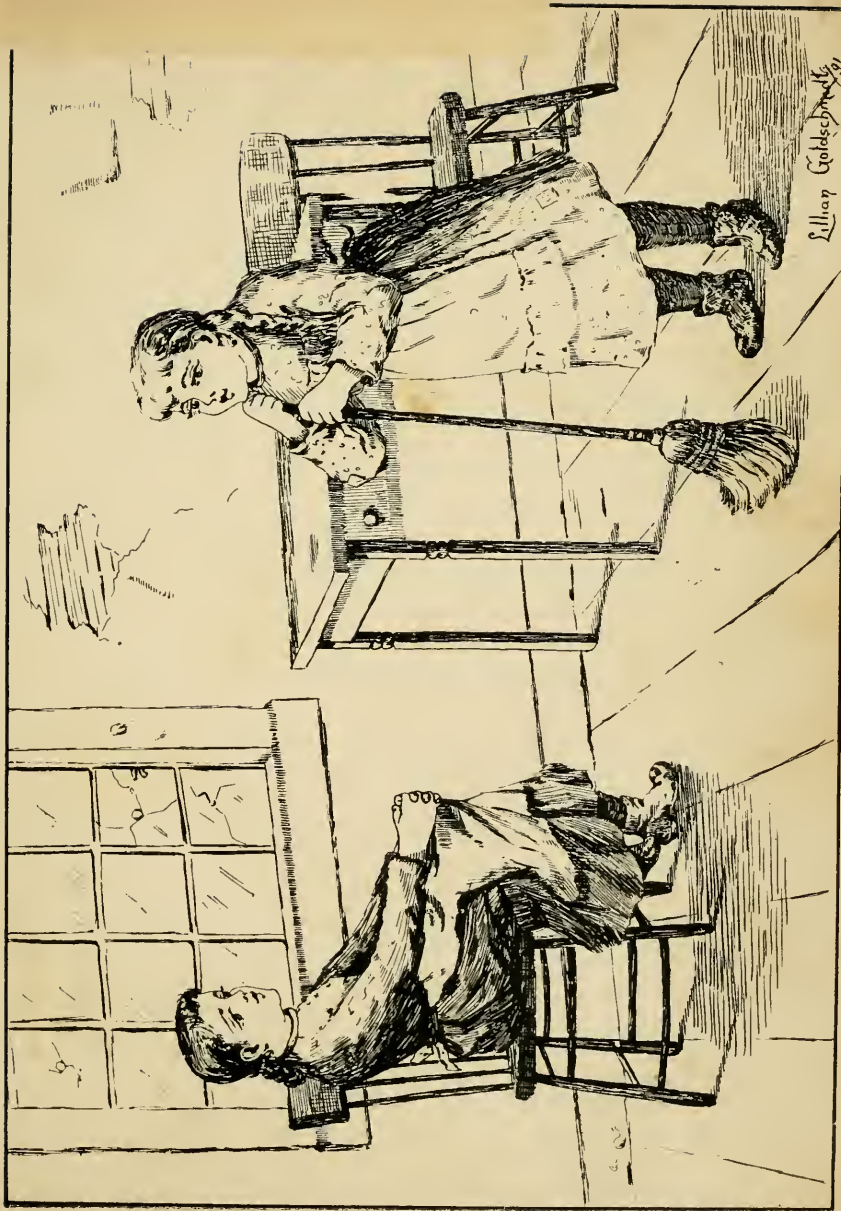
"Do you suppose Dave dislikes his work as much as we do?" asked Mamie, finally.

"Yes, I do," answered Kate. "Dave is a gentleman, and he can never like such a rough crowd as we saw around him that day. I think it must be very hard for him to do what he is doing, and we don't consider that as we should."

"It is clear to me, Kate, that Dave can't do anything else as long as he has us to care for. Do you know what that means?"

"It means that we must try to find some way of taking care of ourselves. We mustn't stand in Dave's way. Mamma would n't want us to do that. But the question is, what shall we do?"

"To begin with," answered Mamie, jumping



"We musn't stand in Dave's way." Page 136.



up from her chair and seizing the broom, "let's make this house look a little more respectable."

A number of changes have been made in the little rooms during the last few months. The room where the boys slept has been divided by a board partition through the middle of it, which is nicely papered on both sides, making two little bedrooms. Mamie went to see the landlord about it, and he put in the partition without extra charge.

The bedstead first bought was then put into the boys' room, and a prettier one bought for the girls. The girls also have some cheap straw matting on their bedroom floor, and a chair and washstand. In the boys' room there are only the bed and three wooden boxes which serve as seats, but everything is very clean. The living room also shows evidences of prosperity, and is so pretty and home-like that Bob says a "millynaire would be glad ter live there if he had any sense."

As soon as the girls put their house in

order that day, they started out to look for work.

“We will be dressmakers,” said Kate.

“Yes,” answered Mamie, “I suppose that would be best; but I’d rather cook than sew. I’d like to learn how to frost cake like that,” she said, stopping to look into the window of a bakery.

Kate turned to go to the window, also, when her quick eye caught sight of Dave, nearly a block away, but coming toward them. His hat was on the back of his head, his hands were deep in his pockets, and, worst of all, he had a cigar in his mouth. He came so near that their eyes met, when Kate suddenly caught hold of Mamie, and the two sisters started on a run for home. Dave threw away the stump of the cigar, and followed at a more leisurely pace, trying to think as he went what would be the best thing for him to say to them. He had changed greatly for the worse during the last few weeks. He disliked any unpleasantness

between himself and his sisters, and he was now thinking how to excuse himself, not because he cared very much for their opinion, but to avoid "a row," as he would have expressed it.

When he entered the room he saw that both the girls had been crying, and suspected that they had brushed away their tears only when they heard his footsteps on the stairs.

"Oh, Dave!" began Kate, struggling to suppress her tears, — "Oh, Dave! dear, dear brother Dave! you never smoked before, did you?"

"Yes," answered Dave, "I have smoked several times before, and I expect to smoke several times again. It is a habit which better men than I am have indulged in, and which girls have no business to interfere with. I've let you girls boss me around until you think you have a right to, but now I think it is time for you to understand that I am not tied to your apron-strings."

The girls stared at their brother in surprise, and for a moment neither could speak. What

did ail Dave? He seemed so different from the loving brother of a few months ago that they could hardly believe their own ears and eyes.

“Dave, what would Mamma say?” Kate spoke gently, but the tears were running fast over her pale cheeks, and she made no effort to conceal them or wipe them away. “She always said you were to be like Papa; and he never, never —”

“I don’t care,” interrupted Dave; “just as good men have smoked. A man who smokes gets along a great deal better in the world. And now I want to know why you stood staring into that bakery as if you had n’t had anything to eat for a week. I was never so ashamed in my life. One would think you were starving!”

“Don’t you talk of shame, Dave Bradley!” interrupted Mamie, and her voice was full of scorn. “You, who are disgracing Papa’s name every day of your life! Do you know why we turned and ran? Because we did not want to speak to you —”

"Oh, Mamie, be careful, dear!" cautioned Kate; but Mamie's temper was thoroughly aroused, and she paid no attention.

"I wish you could have seen yourself with your hat on the back of your head, and that cigar in your mouth, and the nastiest look on your face,—the very nastiest look I ever saw! I shall never forget it. Dave Bradley, you're nothing but a beast, and I shall never love you again."

"Mamie, you shall not talk so!" said Kate, putting her hand firmly over her sister's mouth. "You love Brother Dave now, and you will love him always."

Mamie's burst of temper left as quickly as it came, as it always did under Kate's gentle influence.

"Well, maybe you're right," she said, half laughing, half defiant. "I suspect that I get madder at Dave now, because he always used to be so splendid that I couldn't find fault with him. I want to keep on being proud of

him, and it makes me mad because I can't be."

She reached up as she spoke and kissed her brother's cheek, then dropped her head on his shoulder and cried a little, but only for a minute. Then she raised her head, gave her brother a little shake, and told him that if he didn't go away and leave them alone they should never get dinner ready.

Dave was glad enough to leave the room. He had not thought it would be quite so hard to convince his sisters of his superiority, and his right to do just as he pleased without their interference. He felt less manly when he left the room than when he had entered it, and he wanted to get away from his sisters, that he might regain his good opinion of himself. But he found when he got out into the street that it was not easy to run away from his conscience. Mamie's bitter speech kept ringing in his ears, and it was made worse by the knowledge that it wasn't half as bad as he deserved, for the

cigars that he smoked were bought with money stolen from his little companions. In order to drown his conscience, Dave began to pity himself; he knew from past experience that such a course was quite successful.

“That’s all the pay a fellow gets for doing his best to take care of other folks,” he thought. “If I spent all my money on myself as other boys do, and just had a good time, they might then have something to grumble about; but —” and so he continued, until he had convinced himself that he was the worst-abused boy in the world, and that he needed something which would either make him forget his troubles or help him to bear them. It was not the first time Dave had reached a similar conclusion, nor the first time he had taken a glass of beer, which was the “something” he thought he needed.

It happened that Bob had entered the room when Mamie was scolding Dave, and though he left at once and closed the door softly behind him, he could not help hearing what she said.

“Don’t go in there!” he said quickly to Andy; “they’re a-havin’ a purty hot confab, an’ I spects they’d jist as lief not have us ’round.”

“I wonder what the trouble is,” said Andy.

“The gals have caught on ter Dave’s smokin’, an’ they’re a-jumpin’ on him like mad. I never thunk as how they’d care like that.”

“My mother would,” answered Andy; “she said she never wanted me to smoke.”

“An’ hain’t yer never goin’ ter?”

“No, sir!” answered Andy, decidedly. “Why, Bob, are you?”

“Oh, I spects I will, sometime. I can’t now, ’cause I don’t have the spondulicks ter spare. Dave better be a-lookin’ out, or he’ll be a-wantin’ money some o’ these fine days.”

“Say, Bob!”

“Say it yerself; yer mouth’s wide open.”

Andy laughed a little at what he considered Bob’s joke; but what he had to say did not come easily, and Bob had to urge him a little.

“Don’t yer ‘Say, Bob,’ ter me, an’ then not tell me nothin’,” he said, pretending to be very fierce, “or I’ll mop the floor with yer.”

“Well, I wish—I’d like it—Brother Bob, I do wish you would n’t smoke, never.”

“Why should yer care, Andy? Yer hain’t a womern nor a gal. Them’s the only critters what ought ter care ’bout sich triflin’ things.”

“I do care, Bob. You see it’s just this way. When we die we’ll go where Mother is, and I’ll say to her, ‘Mother, this is my brother Bob;’ and she’ll say, ‘If he’s your brother, he’s my boy.’ I want her to think you’re a hundred times nicer than I am, ’cause you are. She would n’t believe it when she was here.”

“She was n’t stuck on me, was she?” asked Bob. “Be yer sorry yer iver seed me, Andy?”

“Why, no, Bob; what made you say that? I’d be dead now, if it had n’t been for you. I could n’t get along without you; don’t you

know that? Why, Bob, you don't know how splendid you are!"

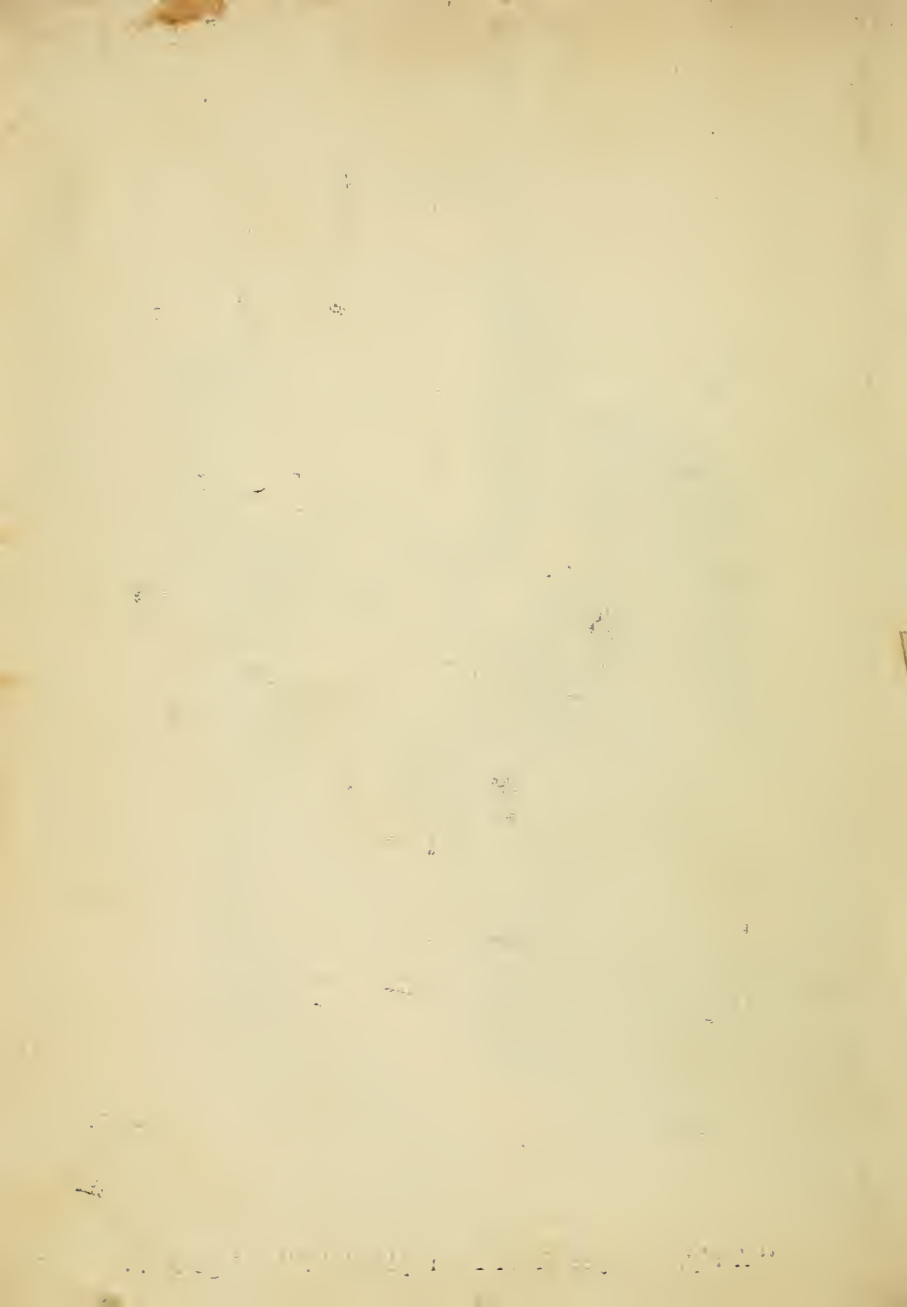
"Andy, does yer think I'm splendid,—does yer, fer sure an' truly?" A strange light was shining in Bob's eyes as he asked the question, and he held Andy's arm so closely that the little fellow shrank away from him, half afraid. "That's jist what Mamie telled Dave he was, but I did n't know as how anybody thunk that there way 'bout me. But I'll tell yer what 'tis, Andy, if yer thinks I'm splendid, I'll be it, if it takes me twenty years,—I will, by the horned toads in the Gulf o' Mexico!"

"And you won't smoke?" asked Andy.

"Smoke! not by a jugful of apple-sass!"



“ Andy, does yer think I am splendid ? ” Page 146.



CHAPTER TENTH.

ONE day, Bob and Andy found themselves in a part of the city where the houses were large and beautiful.

“Look, Bob!” exclaimed Andy, “look at that window! It’s just full of flowers.”

“Purty, hain’t they?” answered Bob. “They’ve got a whole room full of ’em back there. Them folks must have lots of room ter spare, ter be a-usin’ it fer sich foolishness.”

“I wish I had just one flower for each of the girls,” said Andy, who could hardly force himself to pass the pretty window-garden.

“I spect they’d be tickled,” answered Bob, “gals is most always tickled over foolishness. See that feller what is a-peekin’ at us from behind the flowers. Let’s give him a leetle jig, jist fer fun.”

In another minute Bob was playing one of his liveliest tunes, and Andy, who was dressed to look like a circus clown, was keeping time to the music with his feet, and twisting his thin little body into the most uncomfortable positions, and the little boy at the window was laughing more heartily than he had laughed for months.

“Oh, Papa!” he exclaimed, as the boys started off, “they’re going! Hurry, please, and ask them to come again. ‘They’re so funny.’”

The gentleman went to the door, and called to the boys to come back. “Here,” he said, handing each a ten-cent piece, “my little boy wants you to come again to-morrow; will you?”

After that they went every day except Sunday, and played and danced for the thin-faced little boy, who was always watching for them. They were always paid well; but they found it much harder to play so stead-

ily before the same audience, for they felt obliged to change their costumes oftener.

One day they came home to find Dave waiting for his dinner, and both girls gone. The fire had gone out, and Dave was very angry. The girls came in soon after Bob and Andy arrived, and the boys could see that they looked greatly troubled.

"Why is n't dinner ready?" asked Dave, petulantly. "A feller feels good to come home hungry and find nothing to eat, I must say."

"We'll get dinner in a few minutes, Dave," answered Kate, gently.

"Where have you been gadding this time?" was Dave's next question.

"We have been looking for work. We didn't know it was so late, or we should have been home earlier."

"Looking for work!" exclaimed all three boys.

"Yes," answered Kate, "we've been looking for a good many days, but we haven't found

anything yet. We want to take care of ourselves, so Dave can get into nicer work, where he won't have to associate with so many rough men."

"But who'll keep the house?" asked Andy.

"Let 'em alone," answered Dave. "I wish they would get work, and then perhaps they'd let me have a little peace."

"S'posin' Kate should find work, an' Mamie keep house," said Bob; "an' then s'posin' we all chip in an' pay her fer keepin' it, would n't that be fair?"

The other children agreed that it would; and so it was arranged that Kate should look for work, and Mamie should be housekeeper, — a plan that suited both girls very well.

On the day when this arrangement had been decided upon, Bob had made a discovery which excited him greatly, and after dinner he called Andy into their little bedroom and whispered it to him.

"No!" exclaimed Andy.

"Hush!" warned Bob, "don't let the gals hear yer. They take on so like blixen 'bout sich things, yer know. They'd be squallin' 'round here like a couple o' street-sprinklers, an' 't would n't do the least speck o' good. We won't tell 'em till they has 'ter know. Mebbe, if I figgers like time I kin — Thunder an' bees-wax! they're in their room. I wonder if they heard. Let's git ter work."

They had nearly reached the house where the sick boy lived, when they discovered that they were not prepared as they had intended to be.

"By the solid diamond stove-pokers," exclaimed Bob, "jist look at us! We was spectin' ter be niggers ter-day, an' we hain't got our faces blacked. That's what comes o' washin' up afore we eats dinner, jist ter please a couple o' gals."

"But you like it, Bob; you know you do," said Andy.

"Yes," answered Bob, thoughtfully, "I reckon I do. In course, I knows that the washin' up

hain't ter blame; it's jist us, 'cause we didn't tend to our bizness an' paint us black ag'in. But now, how be we a-goin' ter git out o' the serape? That's what's a-stumpin' me. We hain't got time ter go back; an' 'tain't fair ter take the feller's money when we don't give him the hull show."

"I can't see what we'd better do," answered Andy, who seldom had a plan of his own to propose.

"By jing ter gracious!" suddenly exclaimed Bob, "I've got it. We'll play, so's not ter git the leetle feller disapp'inted all ter pieces, but we won't take nary red cent fer it."

"That is the very best thing to do," said Andy.

"I speet I'd better 'xplain afore we begins," said Bob, "so's they won't think as how we're a-cheatin' 'em." And he went up the steps and rang the bell. It never occurred to him that the gentleman and his little boy did not know how they expected to appear, and so would not think they were being defrauded.

“Jerk off yer cap when the door opens!” commanded Bob, in a loud whisper; “yer know, Kate said we must at sich times.”

The tall gentleman came to the door, and Bob began his story, without giving him time to speak.

“If yer pleases,” he said, “we was a-goin’ ter be niggers ter-day, but we plumb fergot ter black up. We’ll play jist the same, but we won’t charge yer nothin’, fer niggers as hain’t black don’t amount ter shucks.”

“Oh, Papa,” called a voice from within, “may n’t they come in a little while?”

“Why, yes,” said the gentleman, smiling down on the queer little figures before him; “that is, if they will. Won’t you come in, boys?” and he led the way into a prettier room than the boys had ever before seen.

“This is my little son, Bertie Lowell,” he said. “As I don’t know your names, you’ll have to introduce yourselves.”

“Interduce,” repeated Bob, who was not at all

abashed by his strange surroundings,—"what's that? Oh, I know, it's a-tellin' names back an' forth. I thunk as how I'd heerd 'bout it afore. Don't yer know, Andy, it's a-bowin', an' a-sayin', 'Happy ter make yer 'quaintance,' an' a-grinnin' like two sick cats what's afeard ter fight. I've seen the interduce, lots o' times."

Bertie's father escaped into another room where he could hear what was going on and could laugh without being seen, and Bob proceeded with the "interduce."

"Mr. Bertie Lowell, this here is Mr. Andy Johnson,—happy ter make yer 'quaintance; an' I'm Mr. Bob—Mr. Bob—golly! come ter think 'bout it, I hain't nothin' but Mr. Bob, but I'm happy ter make yer 'quaintance."

Andy followed Bob's example and repeated, "Happy to make your acquaintance," bowing very low as he did so, and pressing his hand over his heart.

"Won't you be seated?" asked Bertie, politely. He hardly knew what to do with the boys now

he had them with him, they were so very different from the other boys of his acquaintance.

"No, we 'd rather stand up," answered Bob; "we kin see things better that way. I've saw the interduce a good many times on the street, but I did n't jist git the hang of it till Mamie showed me. She's a reg'lar 'ristercrat, Mamie is, an' so's Kate. There hain't many things what they don't know."

"Are they your sisters?" asked Bertie.

"Our sisters!" repeated Bob, with a laugh; "my! but they'd yank yer bald-headed if they heerd yer say that. Would n't they, Andy?"

"They would n't like it very well," answered Andy, who had not spoken since the introduction; and Bertie noticed at once how much more refined his language was than Bob's.

"Dave, he's their brother," continued Bob. "They thunk as how Dave's jist splendid; but he hain't no sech thing. He knows what they thunk, an' he ought ter be pounded flat as a pancake 'cause he don't try ter be it."

“Are they missionaries,” asked Bertie, “little Sunday-school missionaries? I know some nice girls who are.”

“What’s mishonrys?” asked Bob.

“Why, they are folks who try to do good in the world. They live in nice houses, and have everything they want, and they are sorry for the poor people; so they go to their homes and read and pray and sing, and tell them how to keep clean — ”

“I guess they’re jist about half mishonrys,” interrupted Bob. “They don’t have everything they wants, not by a long shot, an’ they lives in the same house we do; but they reads an’ they sings, an’ they fixes the house up purty, an’ they washes our clothes, an’ they makes us trade plates at the table, an’ ev’ry night they’re a-showin’ us how ter read an’ spell an’ ’rithmertick. We’re a-goin’ ter git as ’ristercratic as the dickens afore a great while if we keep catchin’ on so ’mazin’ fast as we’ve been a-doin’.”

“Where’s your mother?” asked Bertie.
“Why doesn’t she fix things up?”

“’Cause we hain’t none of us got a single mother to our backs! The gals an’ Dave had one, but she died, an’ Andy’s mother she died too. It’s mighty funny, the way mothers act now-days. They stay with a feller jist long ’nough ter spile him; then they ups an’ dies. That’s what’s the matter ailin’ o’ my brother Andy, here. He allers looks meechin’, jist like he does now. He could jist wallop hard times, if he had n’t never had no mother. Jist see me, now! I hain’t got no mother, an’ hain’t never had one, an’ I’m tough as leather. I hain’t had no father, neither. Andy, he had a father, but he’s dead; an’ Dave an’ the gals, they don’t know nothin’ ’bout their dad. He may be dead, an’ he may be a-kickin’; there’s no tellin’.”

“And you five children all live together, without any father or mother?” said Bertie.

“I reckon we does,” was the answer.

Just then Mr. Lowell came into the room and went toward Andy, who, thinking himself unobserved, was among the flowers, smelling of them and touching them softly with his face and hands.

"Do you like flowers, my boy?" asked Mr. Lowell.

"I love them!" answered Andy. "Mother had a rose-bush growing in a tin can, and she used to cover it up with her sewing-work at night, so it shouldn't freeze; but I forgot it the very first night she died."

"You may go into the conservatory and see the flowers there, if you'll be careful not to hurt them," said Mr. Lowell; and then he turned to Bob.

"How do you children manage to live?"

"Easy 'nough. Me an' Andy got awfully squoze in the first of the winter, but we're a-gittin' 'long right smart now. I spect it's 'cause we do a heap more hustlin' than we did afore the 'ristercratic part o' the fam'ly

come. We had ter git right down ter bizness, 'cause Dave could n't keep them gals from starvin', no more 'n he could fly with a grindstone tied to his foot."

"But if the girls are not your sisters, why do you care?"

"Waal, me an' Andy, we liked it havin' things fixed up so scrumptious, an' we thunk we 'd better pitch in an' help, or mebbe they 'd have ter run back to where they 'd runned away from."

"And what does the girls' brother do?"

"Sells cigars an' tebaker down on the corner o' Main Street; an' Andy an' me, we 'tracts the crowd. We're a-gittin' ter be powerful 'tractioners. But Kate an' Mamie, they're drefful 'shamed o' our style o' gittin' a livin'. They say as how 'tain't 'spectable, an' they does consid'erable squallin' 'cause Dave don't git more 'ristercratic work. They don't care 'bout me an' Andy, 'cause they think as how we can't never be jist splendid."

"Do you think you can?" was the next question.

"Oh, yes! Andy's purty near that a'ready, an' I'm a-gittin' there purty fast. Yer ought ter seed me as I used ter was afore them gals come. Why, I was a caution ter sick monkeys; but I never knowed it! I'll tell yer somethin' if yer won't tell."

"All right! I promise," answered Mr. Lowell.

"Honor bright? Put yer hand on yer heart, an' say yer hopes ter die if yer tells afore I say yer kin."

Mr. Lowell did as requested, though he could hardly keep from laughing. He felt as if he had n't been so well entertained in a long time.

Bob went close to him and whispered in his ear: "Me an' Andy, we've got six dollars in the bank."

"Is that so?" returned Mr. Lowell, in a whisper. "What is it there for?"

"We 're a-savin' it to help on the livin' when we 're a-larnin' 'ristercratic work. When we

gits more in the bank, an' some new clothes too, we're goin' ter begin. Don't nobody else know we've got a cent."

"What kind of work are you going to get?" asked Mr. Lowell aloud, much to Bertie's satisfaction.

"Don't know. Dave tried ter git 'rister-catic work. He said as how he could get it easy, but nobody would n't pay him nothin' till he'd worked a spell; an' Andy and me, we thunk as how we could work fer nothin', if we had some money fer the livin'."

Mr. Lowell asked a few more questions about the way the children managed, all of which Bob answered freely. Boys were never afraid of Mr. Lowell, and they always trusted him.

"Well, my boy," he said, when he thought he knew all he cared to about the household arrangements of the Queer Family, "I have something to propose to you."

"Fire away!" said Bob; "yer need n't be a mite afeard o' me."

"I am an artist," continued Mr. Lowell, "and I want to paint a picture with you and Andy in it. Perhaps I shall want to put one of the girls in it, too; but I can't tell until I see her. You must come here for two hours every day for a time, and I will give you each twenty-five cents a day. How will that suit you?"

"What must we do?" asked Bob.

"Just stand still where I put you, while I make a picture of you."

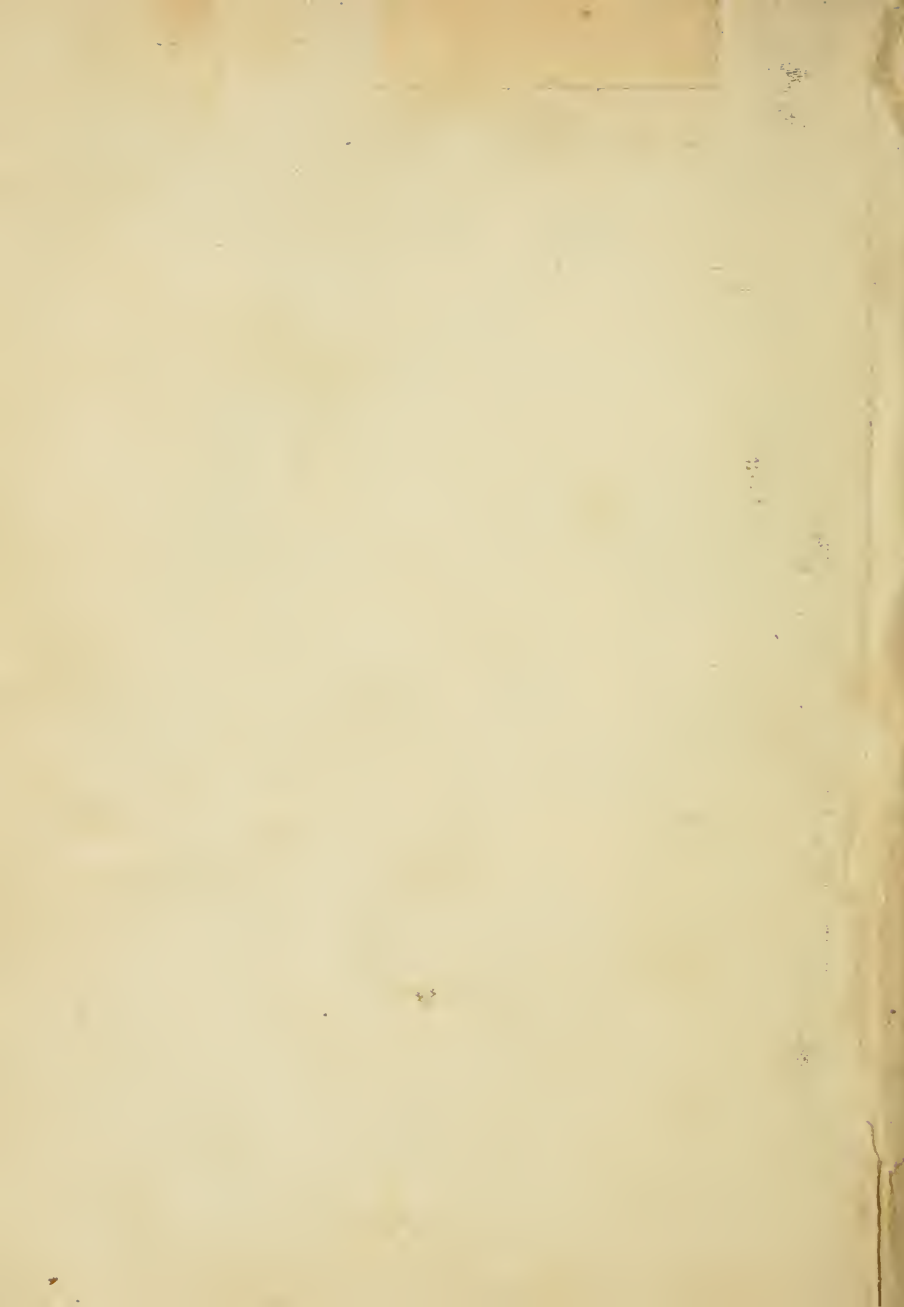
"Earn money standin' still an' doin' nothin'! Andy, did yer hear that? If that don't beat the cast-iron rattlesnakes, I would n't say so. When kin we begin ter work in that there way, Mister?"

"Come to-morrow at the hour you usually come, and bring one of the girls with you. Now you'd better run home, I guess."

"Oh, Papa," pleaded Bertie, "not just yet, please. I have n't visited with them hardly any."



"I want to show you my new Spinning-Wheel." Page 163.



“That’s so, I guess,” said Mr. Lowell, smiling. “I’ve done most of the visiting, have n’t I, little son? Well, they may stay half an hour longer; then you must have your nap.”

“I want to show you my new spinning-wheel,” said Bertie. “Is n’t it pretty? It is n’t truly new, but it’s new to me. Papa found it in the garret. He bought some wool for me, and I’ve got so that I can make real nice yarn now.”

“But what makes yer want ter?” asked Bob.

“To work off my nervousness. Sometimes I get all fidgety inside, and feel as if I must kick or scream, or do something awful; then when I hear my wheel say, ‘Buzz-buzz, whir-whir-r-r,’ I feel ever so much better.”

“Huh! I thunk I’d kick if I wanted ter, an’ I’d yell fit ter split afore I’d jiggle that wheel. Hello, here’s a cat!”

“Yes; that is Popsy. She is the cutest cat that ever lived. Why, do you know, I’ve

taught her to go to sleep all covered up in my cradle, and she never sleeps anywhere else. This is the cradle. It was mine when I was a baby. My feet were not crooked then. The cradle is pretty short for me now, but I like to rock in it when I'm nervous."

Bertie showed the boys a few more of his treasures; then they started on a run for home.

"Golly!" said Bob, "it's too bad 'bout that leetle feller, isn't it? Jist think o' havin' ter make yarn 'cause yer nervous, an' havin' ter rock in a cradle 'cause yer nervous, an' havin' ter learn cats ter go ter sleep in a cradle 'cause yer lonesome, an' havin' ter stay in the house 'cause yer can't walk. Andy, I never sot much store by squallin'; but if I was like that leetle feller, I'd squall till I busted into a hunderd thousand pieces."

CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

"OH, girls!" began Andy, as he and Bob burst breathlessly into the room; but Bob covered Andy's mouth with his hand, and the rest of the sentence was a mumble of words which could not be understood.

"Don't yell it at 'em all ter onc't," said Bob, "or yer'll have 'em a-faintin' plumb away. Jist keep yer mouth shet, Bubby, an' hear me break it to 'em sort o' gradual."

"What is it?" asked the girls together; "is Dave hurt?"

"Naw! Dave's all right. You don't catch him a-goin' where he kin git hurt."

"No," answered Kate; "Dave is too smart to be foolish."

"What kind o' luck did yer have a-gittin'

work, Kate?" asked Bob, as if he had forgotten that he had good news to tell.

Kate's eyes filled with tears, and she could hardly control her voice to answer, "Not very good yet —"

"She has n't found the folks who want her yet," interrupted Mamie, cheerfully; "everybody asked her what she could do, instead of telling her what they wanted to have done. Kate can do a great many things that she couldn't think to tell about at a minute's notice. People act very funny about some things, seems to me. Poor Kate is all tired out, just because of their foolishness."

"Waal, she don't need to be so any more, jist 'count o' that," answered Bob, calmly; and Andy became so excited that he began a livelier dance than Bob had thought him capable of. Bob caught up the violin and began to furnish music, dancing wildly about the room as he did so.

"Oh, boys, please do behave!" pleaded Kate.

"I'm pretty near sick to know what you mean."

The music and dancing stopped instantly.

"Waal, this," said Bob. "Yer goin' ter git twenty-five cents fer two hours' work at gittin' yer picter took; that is ter say, if the man likes yer."

"And he will, Kate, I know," said Andy.

"Me an' Andy, we're a-goin' inter the same kind o' bizness, an' we're all a-goin' ter begin to-morrer. Now, s'posin' we each give Mamie five cents fer stayin' at home an' fixin' things," he added.

The plan was talked over and agreed to, and then the girls wanted to know more about the work. They could not understand what it was to be, nor how the boys happened to find it.

"Who is this man?" asked Kate.

"The man where we've played every day," explained Andy, excitedly; "Bertie's father, and the spinning-wheel —"

"Oh, great guns!" interrupted Bob, with a

shout. "A man the father of a spinnin'-wheel! Oh, blazin' fish-hooks!"

"I did n't say that, Bob; you know I did n't," said Andy, protestingly.

"Did n't yer?" answered Bob, with a grin. "Waal, p'r'aps yer did n't. Mebbe I was a-list-'nin' with my elbows. Now, gals, yer hain't got no more call ter worry 'bout Dave. An', Andy, we'd better black our faces an' be a-gittin', or Dave won't know what's up. Anythin' yer wants us ter buy, gals?"

"Not to-night," began Kate; but Mamie interrupted, —

"Don't you think we ought to have a treat to-night, when we've had such good news?"

"Sartain!" answered Bob.

"Hurrah for the treat!" said Andy.

"What shall it be?" asked Kate.

"Oh, if we could afford some oranges, and a tiny cake, and a little bit of dried beef," said Mamie.

"Hooray fer oranges an' cake an' dry beef,"

said Bob, "fer they're a-comin' sure as lightnin' in the summer-time!" and the boys went out, banging the door behind them.

"They're awfully kind-hearted boys," said Mamie when she and Kate were alone.

"I know it," answered Kate. "Is n't it too bad that they're so — so uncivilized? I don't see why they can't be more like Dave, when they have him every day to copy after."

"Maybe they will be some time. They're learning real fast. I'm going to work harder than ever to teach them things, because they're so good to us."

"I'll help," answered Kate. "I have n't done half so much for them as you have, Mamie."

"You've taught them how to read. Of course Andy knew a little; but Bob —" began Mamie.

"But you patched their dirty clothes, and cut their hair, and made them take a bath; and all the worst of it you've done."

Then the girls began to plan how they should tell Dave of the good fortune that had come to

them, and that now they could take care of themselves, and he could find nice work and not worry about them.

"I'm sure he will be just as he used to, if he gets away from that crowd of rough men," said Mamie; and that was the only acknowledgment the girls made to each other of the rapid change for the worse which they saw in their brother.

Supper was on the table when they heard steps on the stairs, and an eager light came into their eyes as they waited for their brother to come into the room; but Bob and Andy came without him.

"Where is Dave?" asked Mamie.

"He hain't a-comin'," answered Bob, "not jist now. He said we was n't ter wait fer him. He said he'd promised ter see a feller, an' did n't know when he could git shet o' him."

"Perhaps he has heard of some nice work," said Kate. "Would n't it be funny if he should have a bigger surprise for us than we have for him?"

"You didn't tell Dave about the work, did you, boys?" asked Mamie.

"Nop," they answered together. "Nary lisp," added Bob.

"That's awfully good of you. I don't see how you kept still about it. I should have had to tell it, I know."

"That's cause yer a gal," said Bob.

"I don't like to sit down to supper without Dave," said Kate, without giving Mamie time to reply. "Did he tell you how long he would stay?"

"He said as how he didn't want no supper, an' mebbe he wouldn't git home till we was all gone ter bed."

"Then there's no use waiting," said Mamie. "Bob, can't you wait on the table to-night?"

"Yer bet!" answered Bob. "The way I'll hustle the grub onto the plates, an' 'tend ter the tradin' of 'em will be a caution ter rattlesnakes."

The children tried to enjoy their nice little

feast, but it did n't taste as good as they thought it would. They tried to talk and laugh, but before long they all sat silent, their thoughts with the one who was absent. The girls were trying to persuade themselves that he was on the track of something which would please them; Andy was thinking of a very unpleasant incident which had taken place that evening, and wondering how long the girls could be kept in ignorance of their brother's real character; and Bob himself was wondering what course he ought to pursue, now that the suspicion he had had for some time proved to be a truth.

That evening when they had divided the company money, Bob had quietly remarked that Dave's box was about as full as the company box.

"Yer seems ter git along better when we ain't here than yer does when we is," he said, "an' we don't make so much here as we does in other places."

Dave's face became a little paler, but he determined to act as if no one had any right to suspect him of stealing. He didn't know how hard it was for a guilty boy to act like an innocent one.

"I'd like to have you explain yourself," he said loftily.

"We're going to get respectable work," said Andy; "that is, after a while. We're going to associate with decent folks," he added, unconsciously repeating Kate's words.

Dave chose to become angry. He always adopted that course when he wanted to change the conversation, if he thought there was danger of exposure.

"I guess I'm as decent as you are," he said, loudly, raising his arm as if to strike Andy.

In a minute Bob stood before him with flashing eyes. "If yer strikes Andy," he said, "if yer strikes him even a leetle blow what don't hurt him any, I'll thrash yer till yer'll wish yer'd never seed me."

"Oh, Bob," began Andy, beginning to cry, "please don't! He b'longs to the girls; don't fight him!"

"Stop yer squallin'!" commanded Bob. "Stop it quick, afore I gits mad!" Then turning to Dave again, he said: "Yer kin strike me onc't, if yer wants ter, an' I'll try not ter strike back, 'cause the gals, they don't like fightin'; but if yer strikes me twic't, or even if yer shakes yer fist at me more'n onc't, I'll make sausage meat out of yer. Now, if yer don't know what I means 'bout the comp'ny money, yer kin ask me some questions, all yer wants ter, an' I'll answer 'em so quick it'll make yer hair curl."

Dave saw that Bob guessed what he had been doing, and thought it would be best to smooth matters over a little.

"I've got an awful headache, Bob," he said, "and it makes me nearly crazy. I get mad at nothing when I have a headache. I think we'd better go on together a little while longer, don't

you? You can't get into anything else, if you try."

"Mebbe," answered Bob; "but we kin make more at this when we work by ourselves."

Then Dave sent a message to the girls, telling them not to wait for him; and when the boys had gone he returned to the saloon where most of his afternoon had been spent, and where his headache had been gained. He was not at all pleased over the prospect of getting along without Bob and Andy, for he knew how much less money he would make. He was very uncomfortable because his dishonesty had been discovered, and he concluded, as many foolish boys have done, to drown his trouble in strong drink. It was late when he finally staggered upstairs and found his way to bed; but Bob still tossed restlessly, unable to go to sleep. He had been trying to decide what he ought to do about Dave, and whether or not he should tell the girls what he knew.

CHAPTER TWELFTH.

THE next morning Dave arose late, and his breakfast remained untouched. The girls feared that he was sick, but he soon gave them to understand that he did n't care to be questioned. He did n't take much interest even in the wonderful secret which they had to tell him, but muttered something about its being high time for them to help take care of themselves, then put on his hat and left the room without bidding them good-by.

"Dave is going to be sick," said Kate; "he would never act that way, unless something awful was the matter. I don't know what we shall do if he is sick. Mamie, I wish we had never left the farm."

"Well, we did leave it," said Mamie, "and wishing won't help matters a bit. If Dave is

sick, we must take care of him the best we can. I know Bob and Andy will help us."

"I shouldn't like to ask them to. You know, Mamie, they are not quite so — we don't think them so nice as Dave — that is, in some ways, — and it doesn't seem right to ask favors of them."

"We shouldn't have to ask," replied Mamie. "They see what we want now, without asking."

Kate agreed with her sister, and neither of the girls realized how great was the compliment which they had paid the two boys whom they considered beneath themselves and Dave. It is n't always wise to judge by appearances, and it is never wise to think that appearances cannot tell against one who is trying to do right.

That night Dave again sent word that he should not be home to supper. Bob knew that he had gone with a number of boys about his own age to visit a companion who roomed by himself, and that wine had been provided. He had gone to the door of the room and asked to

see Dave; but Dave had called to the boy who opened the door that he wished to see no one, and Bob had been told that if he didn't hurry downstairs he would be thrown out of the window.

Bob returned home, and tried to get the girls to go to bed early.

"I've got ter 'tend ter the scrubbin' o' myself," he said, "an' I've got ter do it here by the fire."

"Wait a minute!" said Kate. "I want to see if Andy can do this example in long division, and you ought to read that next lesson to-night too."

And so they had lingered longer than they intended to, and did not notice the time until they were disturbed by the sound of many feet struggling up the stairs. Bob started toward the door; but before he got there it was pushed open, there was a heavy fall, and Dave lay at the feet of the sisters who idolized him, helplessly drunk.

“Drunk as a fool!” said one of the boys who brought him in, and his pronunciation showed that his own condition was but little better. “Hard work getting upstairs,” he added; but Bob interrupted, —

“Yer won’t have hard work gittin’ downstairs, if yer don’t hustle out o’ this. Git, now, afore yer has ter.”

“Nice way to thank —” began the boy; but again Bob interrupted, —

“If yer’d let me see him when I wanted ter, I’d ’a’ brung him home myself. Git, now, purty quick!”

Bob slammed the door in the faces of the tipsy boys; then, going to Dave, shook him roughly, to arouse him.

“Dave Bradley,” he said, “jist git right up an’ go ter bed. Hustle, afore I pours burnin’-hot coals all over yer!”

The stupid boy aroused himself and staggered out of the room, with the help of Bob and Andy.

“Yer gals, git ter bed,” said Bob, as he left the room. “I’ll take keer o’ Dave; yer can’t do nothin’.” And there was nothing for the shame-stricken, broken-hearted girls to do but obey.

The next morning Dave was too sick to get up; but Bob cared for him as tenderly as a brother could have done, and did all he could for the girls. It was several days before Dave appeared in the living-room, although he was kept away more by shame than by sickness. One evening Bob coaxed him into the room.

“Here’s Dave, gals,” he said cheerfully. “He’s as rambunctious as a kitten what’s sp’ilin’ fer a play.”

“Hello, Dave,” said Mamie, faintly; and Kate smiled a little, and put a chair near the stove for him.

“I — I — suppose you — hate me!” ventured Dave.

“No, we don’t,” answered Kate, with tears in her eyes.

“Dave isn’t going to do it again,” put in Andy, softly. “He is very sorry, and he says he will never do another thing to make you ashamed. Please don’t think about it any more, but like Dave just as much as you used to.”

Then they all broke down and cried except Bob, and he walked very fast around the room and cleared his throat several times before he could speak.

“I never seed sich a squallin’ meetin’,” he said, as he put on his cap; “an’ I’m goin’ ter git out o’ this till yer’ve squalled yerselves dry.”

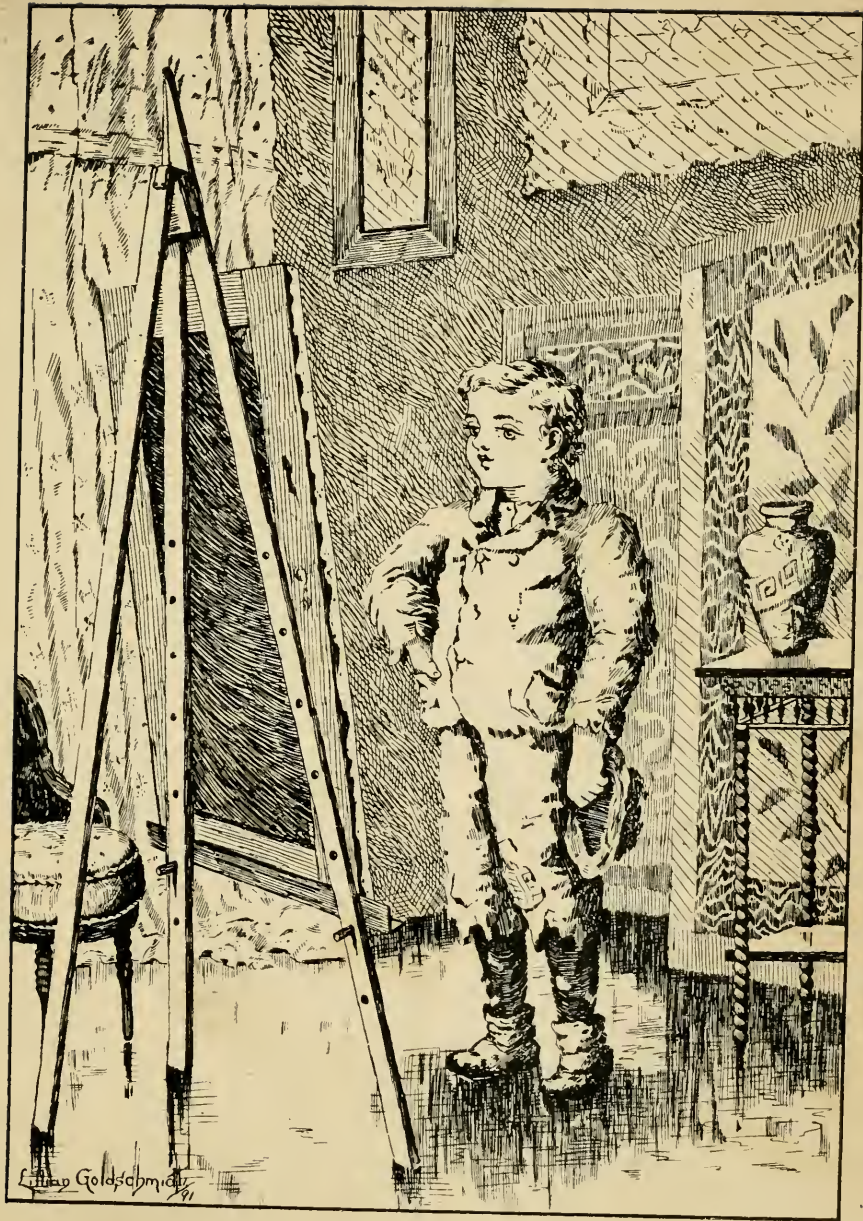
When he returned to the room, the children were talking about other things; but Andy told him afterward that the girls did n’t kiss their brother, as they always had done when making up their differences of opinion.

“I suppose,” he added, “that they have n’t forgot yet how awful he looked that night; I know I have n’t, and it does n’t seem as if I ever should.”

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

SEVERAL weeks passed, and Dave tried to do business at the old stand and keep away from the saloon; and Bob watched him so closely that he spent no more nights away from home. Two or three times his companions' entreaties had been too strong for him to resist, and he had taken strong drink; but Bob had always found him and taken him home before he became tipsy, and then Dave would again try hard to reform. He never visited alone with his sisters now, fearing their reproaches; and, as Bob said, "Dave hain't got pluck ter stand up ter a scoldin', no matter how much he ought ter git it."

Bob waited on the table all the time now, and bought all the supplies; for Dave had



"Stan ling before the nearly finished Picture." Page 183.



no money to spend in that way. When he was at home he either read to himself or slept, and every day he seemed to grow farther away from Kate and Mamie.

The picture was nearly finished now, and Mr. Lowell told the children that he should need them but once more.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Kate, "then I shall be out of work."

"You may have better work," answered Mr. Lowell, smiling. "Do you remember a pretty lady with white hair whom you saw here one day?"

"Mrs. Manning, do you mean?" answered Kate. "She was so very kind to me."

"Well, she wants to see you. Perhaps she has work for you. I think you'd better go right over."

While Mr. Lowell was speaking, he noticed Bob trying to attract Andy's attention. Turning to Andy, he saw him standing before the nearly finished picture with great tears rolling swiftly over his pale face.

“Why, Andy!” he began; but Bob interrupted.

“Yer must 'xcuse him, sir,” he said; “he hain't squallin' 'cause o' you. He gits took that way sometimes, spite of all I kin do; but he don't mean anythin' by it. Please don't git mad at him. It all comes o' his havin' had a mother.”

“What is it, my boy?” asked Mr. Lowell, going to Andy and putting his arm around him. “Does n't the picture suit you?”

“No, sir,” sobbed Andy, “I don't like to look that way. I don't want folks to see that.”

“It's 'cause yer've writ him down ter look jist zif he was squallin',” explained Bob, who thought he understood. “Yer've got his face so long-y like. If yer could make it wide ways more, an' put some laugh in his eyes, an' some happy 'round his mouth, I thunk as how he'd like it better. This don't look like Andy's inside. Yer'd know if yer knowed him real well. There's a lot o' laugh in Andy's inside.”

“Andy,” said Mr. Lowell, “how would you like to come here every day just to wait on Bertie?”

“Oh, I love to do things for Bertie!” replied Andy, with shining eyes.

“I thought so. I’ve been watching you closely these last few weeks. Can you begin now?”

“I — don’t — know,” he answered slowly. “It’s time I was dancing, isn’t it, Bob?”

“Yes,” answered Bob.

“Do you like to dance in the street?” asked Mr. Lowell.

“Oh, you know I don’t!” he answered. “I hate it! I hate it, and hate it, and hate it, but I can’t help it. We can’t get nice work, now Dave’s —” He hesitated.

“Now Dave is what?” asked Mr. Lowell.

“Bob said not to tell, ’cause the girls would feel bad if we did.”

“Don’t tell, then. Bob will tell me himself after a while. Andy, how would you like to

live here always, and be my boy and Bertie's brother?"

"Does — does Bertie want me?" Andy was almost too excited to speak.

"Bertie spoke about it first. He says he wants you very much."

"Would I have to stay nights too?"

"Of course. You would live here just as Bertie does."

"I should like to live here," replied Andy, slowly, and with a great longing shining out of his eyes as they rested on the beautiful objects in the room, "I'd like it, but I can't leave my brother Bob."

"Andy, let's be gittin' out o' this," said Bob, rising quickly and grasping Andy by the arm.

"Wait a moment!" said Mr. Lowell. "Andy, go to Bertie for a moment; I want to talk with Bob."

When Andy had left the room, Mr. Lowell said, "Bob, I believe you to be an unselfish

boy. You love Andy, and want to do the best you can for him, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bob. "I hain't never had nobody else but Andy. He's 'rister-cratikier than I be, but he ain't so great on hustlin' fer spondulicks, an' I'm a-goin' ter git rich some day an' buy every purty thing what he wants."

Then Mr. Lowell told Bob how long Andy would have to wait for that time, and how much better it would be for him to come to live with Bertie. He talked very earnestly for a long time, and when he finished Bob knew that it would be very selfish for him to keep Andy.

"If you really love Andy," Mr. Lowell said, "you will urge him to stay here, now that you know it is for his good. He wants to come, I know, and he would stay to-night, if it were not for you."

"'Tain't fer me," faltered Bob. "Andy b'longs in jist sich a place as this, an' he's

got ter stay here. I'll make him stay, if I has ter purty near kill him."

Then Mr. Lowell went out of the room and told Andy that Bob wanted to see him.

"Oh, Papa!" said Bertie, tearfully, "Andy won't stay. He says he can't leave Bob."

"Don't cry, dear," said the father, when Andy had left the room; "I think Bob will tell him that he would better stay with us."

"Andy," began Bob, as the little boy entered the room, — "Andy, does yer want ter — Andy, let's git out doors; it's easier a-talkin' there."

"Let's go home," said Andy, when they reached the steps. "We've wasted lots of time here."

"We can't go yit," replied Bob. "I'm a-goin' ter tell yer somethin' as will s'prise yer — Let's git inter the house ag'in. I thunk as how that's the best place, arter all."

Out there the temptation to take Andy by

the hand and hurry home was so great that Bob was afraid he could not resist it. He concluded that what he had to say would come easier if he saw Andy among the beautiful things he loved so dearly, and the two boys returned to the room. Mr. Lowell, who had been watching them, said nothing, and left them to themselves.

"Andy," begun Bob, "yer've got ter stay here. There hain't no way 'round it."

"Don't, Bob, don't say that! I want to stay with you. Bob, don't you like me any more?"

"I like yer better than I do — than I like spondulicks, — better than the whole world; but that hain't a-sayin' as how I want yer hangin' 'round me any longer."

"Bob, dear brother Bob, what do you mean? You're not yourself. Let's go home till you get better."

"Yer hain't got no home," said Bob, desperately. "If yer tries ter climb up the

stairs, I'll kick yer down 'em ag'in. I tell yer I don't want yer hangin' 'round."

Poor Bob! With his love for Andy, and his determination to be unselfish, and his ignorance of the best way to proceed, he was being led into saying some very hard things. Andy could not understand it, and his warm little heart was nearly broken.

"Bob!" he sobbed, "I do wish I knew what ails you."

"That's right," said Bob; "squall a leetle while. I spects it'll make yer feel better, an' I guess I kin stand it. I'm goin' ter try ter git some other kind o' work," he added vaguely, "an' I kin git along a heap faster if yer hain't 'round; don't yer see?"

"Why, Bob, I thought I helped you. Didn't I dance hard enough? Bob, I tried to help you."

"Yer tried, but yer didn't 'mount ter much. I didn't tell yer, 'cause yer couldn't do no better; but now yer've got sich a

chance as this here, I thunk as how yer'd better take it. I've got all I kin do ter look out fer them gals."

Just then Mr. Lowell entered the room.

"Here he am," said Bob, pushing Andy toward him. "Yer kin have him; I hain't got no use fer him any more."

Without waiting for either of them to speak, Bob left the room and hurried away down the street.

"Oh!" wailed Andy, "Bob does n't like me any more, and I feel as if I was going to die."

"Bob does like you," said Mr. Lowell, drawing Andy toward him; "and some day I'll tell you how I know."

"But he does n't want me any more, and he says I've been — I've been a trouble to him, and — and — Oh, dear! I wish I could die this minute."

Mr. Lowell comforted Andy as best he could, and finally said, "I'll tell you something if you won't cry any more to-night."

“Don’t tell me, please; for I think I can’t stop crying. I want Bob awfully.”

“Well, then, you need n’t promise; but something very nice is going to happen to Bob before long.”

Bob found his way to the park, when he left Mr. Lowell’s house, and threw himself down on one of the snow-covered benches.

“I’ve got ter squall, I spects,” he said; “I’ve got ter squall or bust, an’ I’d a heap sight rather bust.” But nature would have her way this time, and Bob cried. “There was n’t nobody else what cared shucks fer me,” he said, “an’ there hain’t nobody else what ought ter have him. I’m a-goin’ right back ter git him. He hain’t got no bizness ter leave me; he can’t like no ’ristercrats better nor me. I spect he hates me now, though, ’cause I talked so ugly ter him. I guess Mr. Lowell knows now as how I loved Andy with the nicest style o’ love. He thunk as how I did n’t, an’ as how I was selfish. I spect Andy’s squallin’ now, an’ a-wantin’

me ter come an' git him, an' by the dancin' horn-spoons I'm a-goin' ter do it!" He brushed the tears from his eyes and started on a run for Mr. Lowell's house, but stopped before he had gone a block. "Yer mean, selfish, low-down cove!" he said to himself, "yer knows as how it's a rattlin' good place fer Andy, an' why can't yer let him alone, 'stid o' squallin' an' yippin' an' howlin' an' runnin' arter him, jist zif he was a-goin' ter git hung. Jist dry right up, an' go home an' be decent!"

In Mrs. Manning's beautiful home, another interesting scene was being enacted. Mrs. Manning had talked with Mr. Lowell about the children, and had decided to adopt Kate.

"My own little girl would have been just her age had she lived," she said; "and sometimes I fancy that Kate looks as she did." To her great surprise, when she mentioned her plan to Kate, the girl declined the offer.

"I can't come, Mrs. Manning," she said.

"You are very kind, but I can't leave my sister Mamie."

"Suppose we let Mamie come too? If I should like her appearance as well as I do yours, I don't know that I should object to having two girls."

"We can't come, Mrs. Manning. It would n't be right. We mustn't leave Brother Dave. Mamma would n't like it, I know. Dave is n't so nice as he used to be, but maybe if we stay with him we can get him to be good again."

"What does he do?" asked Mrs. Manning.

Kate's face became very red, and hot tears filled her eyes. "If you please," she said, "I would rather not tell. When he is good again, he will feel sorry to have folks know."

So it was arranged that Kate should spend her days with Mrs. Manning, but her nights were to be spent at home. She went away at eight o'clock in the morning, and returned at seven in the evening, and she received fifty cents for every day spent there.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

THE next day when Bob and Kate went, for the last time, to "have their picters took," as Bob said, they found Andy waiting for them at the window, and so changed in appearance that they hardly knew him.

"Got new clothes, hain't yer?" was Bob's greeting. He had determined not to let Andy know how he missed him.

"Yes," said Andy, "and my name is Andrew J. Lowell now. He," pointing to Mr. Lowell, "says the papers are all made out, and now I'm just as much his boy as Bertie is. But, oh, Bob! I want you. I shall die if I can't have you."

"Git out!" exclaimed Bob, "yer said that same when yer could n't have yer mother. Folks

don't die 'cause they can't have things the way they wants 'em I know, 'cause I hain't dead."

"Brother Bob, don't you care at all 'cause you haven't got me? What did you do yesterday? Did you play, when I wasn't there to dance?"

"Nop. Did n't I tell yer I was a-goin' ter find some other way to rake in the spondulicks?"

"Are you glad I 'm here, Bob?"

"Yep, you bet!"

Andy's eyes filled with tears. "Bob," he cried, "you don't like me, and I know it now; and it makes me ache in here," putting his hand on his heart. Bob's arms were around him in an instant.

"Andy," he said, "I likes yer more nor anythin' else what ever was; but yer've got ter stay here a leetle while. Mr. Lowell hain't a-goin' ter keep yer allers, an' he need n't think he is. I'm a-goin' ter git rich, an' then I'm a-goin' ter 'dopt yer back ter me ag'in'."

“ Oh, Bob ! do you suppose you could ? ”

Andy's eyes were very bright.

“ I knows it,” answered Bob, confidently.

“ But what would my name be then ? ”

“ Mr. Andrew J. Bob ! ” answered Bob, promptly. “ Did yer ever hear sich a 'ristercratic name as that is in all yer born days ? Gee whillikins, but it's a high-soundin' buster, hain't it ? ” and Andy agreed that it was.

Then the two boys had a sort of business meeting. Andy and Bob had each five dollars, which they had been saving for new suits for themselves, besides what they had in the bank.

“ You are to have it all,” said Andy, “ 'cause I don't need it now.”

“ S'pose yer give Mamie two dollars,” suggested Bob. “ She feels awful 'cause she can't earn some fer her own self.”

“ All right,” replied Andy ; “ but you keep the rest. It will help you to get rich quicker, and then — ”

“ An' then, hooray ! ” interrupted Bob, “ we 'll

'dopt each other quicker 'n a dog kin howl when his tail is pulled."

When Bob reached home that night he waited on the table, as usual, but he didn't eat any supper. He told Mamie that he couldn't eat, because there was a lump in his throat that he couldn't swallow. After supper he tried to help around the house as he had seen Andy do, but he did not sing as he always had before whenever he began to work. He went out to look for Dave, but did not find him at his stand on the corner, nor in any of the places where he usually looked for him, and so was obliged to return without him.

"I'm sorry fer the gals," he said to himself, "but I'm glad fer this chicken. That there lump in my throat hain't there fer nothin'. It means business. I'm jist a-pinin' fer Andy, an' that's what's the matter ailin' of me, an' I knows it. I'm a-pinin' fer Andy, an' what's more I've been a-pinin' ever since yesterday. I've got ter do some more squallin'. I

squalled more 'n a quart yesterday, but I feel zif there was gallons o' tears left."

"Could n't find Dave," he said, opening the door and sticking his head into the room. "I'm a-goin' ter bed now, but don't yer set up fer him. I'll hear him when he comes. Yer can't do nothin' if yer sets up all night."

He closed the door more quietly than usual, and went to his own room. Reaching under the bed, he drew out a pair of old boots which had been placed there by Andy a few days before when he had bought a new pair.

"We'd better keep them a little while," Andy had said, "'cause maybe we'll find somebody who has n't any at all."

They were so badly worn as to be entirely useless, but now they were very precious to poor, lonely Bob. Hugging them close against his breast, he crept into bed, pulled the bedding over his head, and — well, he need not have been ashamed of what he did, but since he was, we will pretend that we know nothing about his

crying a second time, and harder than he had cried the day before. He had nearly cried himself to sleep when he heard some one coming up the stairs, and then his door was opened, and Dave's voice reached him, —

“ Bob, are you there ? ”

“ Yes, Dave ; why ? ”

“ Get up, quick, please ! The girls haven't gone to bed yet, and — and there may be trouble.”

“ Go in if yer goin' to,” said a thick voice in the little hall ; and then Bob knew that Dave had not come home alone. In a moment he was dressed, and had followed Dave and his companion into the other room, where the girls sat waiting for their brother.

“ His name's Dave Bradley, David Spencer Bradley,” said the stranger, — a dreadfully dirty man, who looked as if a large part of his life had been spent in the gutter. As he spoke he turned toward Bob, and pointed his shaking finger at Dave.

"Where 'd yer run 'crost him?" asked Bob of Dave.

"I seen him in the s'loon," said the man, "an' I knowed him in a minute. I'm his dad. My name's David Spencer Bradley, too, and he's my kid. He looked like me when he was a little feller, and he looks like me now. He takes after me, too; don't you, Gov'nor?" and he nudged Dave slyly, and laughed in a way that frightened the girls and made them move closer to Bob. The old man noticed them.

"Here's my gals!" he said. "I'll bet the drinks on it. Let me see,—the black-eyed one was named Kate, after my mother; and the blue-eyed one was named Mary, after Dora's mother. We called her Mamie. Come here, gals, and kiss yer dad."

He moved toward the girls as if to kiss them, and both Bob and Dave stepped between him and them.

"If yer touch 'em," said Bob, "I'll knock yer down."

"And who be you?" asked the man. "I don't remember as I had two boys."

"Yer didn't have me, nohow," answered Bob, "an' I'm glad of it. I ain't sot on havin' sich a dad as you be."

The three children could not deny the man's claims. He knew them all too well; and besides there was a strong resemblance between the father and the son. For the first time since they had known Bob, they realized that they really had no right to claim superiority.

"Oh, well," said the man, "I sha'n't spoil if I don't kiss 'em jist yet. Bring yer ma, and I'll kiss her instead."

"Mother is dead," answered Dave, in a voice that trembled with excitement.

"Dead! Is that so? Bad, ain't it? I sorter gave her the slip, years ago; she was too pious and straight-laced to suit me, and I skipped. A feller could n't have any fun without her squawking about it, so I went to sea. I reckoned that I'd come back when I'd had my fling, for I set

quite a store by her and you kids; but I did n't git over tryin' to have a good time. I hain't had it yet; but, Dave, now I've found you, I feel as if it was comin' right along. You and me will paint this whole town red, my boy, won't we?"

Dave's face was deathly pale, and his eyes were big with horror.

"What shall I do with him?" he asked Bob. "I hate to have him here where the girls can see him; he is n't fit to be in the same room."

"He ain't much worse than they've seen you," answered Bob, bluntly. "It's jist as he says, Dave; yer a pieter of yer dad."

"Course he is," said the man, who had heard the last words. "Dave, my boy, you're a kid that any daddy might be proud of. We don't b'lieve in bein' tied to a womern's apern-strings, do we? Come now, let's celebrate the happy meetin'; I've got the wherewithal, and I want to drink to the health o' my bloomin' little fam'ly."

As he spoke, he took a bottle from his pocket; but Bob snatched it quickly away.

"No, yer dōn't," he said, throwing the bottle out of the window. "Yer don't swaller none o' that here."

"Girls, please go to bed!" said Dave. "This is too dreadful for you to see. Poor little sisters!"

He led his sisters from the room, and then returned.

"What is to be done, Bob? My head's in a whirl, and I can't think."

"I don't know, 'thout yer burns him up!" answered Bob, in a tone of disgust. "It was bad 'nough ter have yer actin' like a fool 'round here. I don't see why yer didn't come home 'stid o' goin' inter s'loons after yer telled me yer would n't, an' huntin' up sich a dad as that ter bring home with yer. If 'twa'n't fer the gals, I'd give yer both ter the perlice."

Bob had spoken louder than he intended to, and the girls heard him.

“He is our father, Bob,” said Kate, gently, as she opened the door, “and I suppose we must take care of him. Mother would want us to, I think.”

“It’s awful,” wailed Mamie, “but we can’t turn him out. I don’t suppose he’d go, anyway.”

“You bet!” answered the old man, drowsily. “I’ve found my kids, and they’ve got to take care of me. That’s what kids is for.”

“I’ll help you, girls,” said Dave. “I mean it this time. I’m just as much like him — I’m more like him now than I shall ever be again.”

The boys put the old man to bed in their own room, then threw themselves down to sleep on a quilt by the stove; for even Bob, who had often slept on the street, could not make up his mind to sleep with a drunkard who looked so terrible.

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

THE next day Mr. Lowell met Bob on the street.

"Hello, Bob," he said, "I was just coming to see if I could find you."

"Is — is anythin' ailin' Andy?" he asked.

"Nothing at all except that he misses you. You're a brave boy, Bob, and I hope you'll never be sorry for what you've done."

"I'm sorry now," said Bob; "I'm that sorry now that I want ter bust."

"Bob, do you really want Andy to go back and live with you?"

Bob thought a moment. "No, sir, I does n't. Things is wusser nor when he was there, an' he could n't sleep on the floor, an' — an' — tell him I'm glad he's your boy."

"I will. Now I want to take you to see a friend of mine who is looking for a boy whom he can trust."

In less than a quarter of an hour Mr. Lowell and Bob walked into the office of the firm of Ware Brothers, the very place whose advertisement had been answered by Dave in the fall; and in less than an hour Bob was at work for them. Mr. Ware gave him all sorts of disagreeable tasks, and watched him closely as he went to work; and Bob did the best he could, and sang at his work "enough to raise the roof," as Mr. Ware reported to Mr. Lowell.

"He does n't know much," he said, "but he is willing to learn; he goes to work cheerfully, and there is nothing of the shirk about him. I think I shall like him first-rate."

"'Tain't all honey an' m'lasses," said Bob, when telling the girls about it in the evening; "but I'll fergit what I hates now, when I'm a big-bug like Mr. Ware. He said he was poor an' did n't 'mount ter much when he was my

age; he did all his own hustlin', an' yer kin bet the cat's hind leg that I'll git there, if hustlin' kin do it."

"You can't be a gentleman," said Mamie, "until you learn to talk as other folks do. You've got nice work now, and you're just splendid, all but your way of talking."

"Mamie, does yer truly think that, — the 'jist splendid,' yer know?"

"Of course I do, or I should n't have said it. Kate thinks so too; she said so yesterday."

Bob took his cap and went out into the street. "She said as how she would n't 'a' said it if she had n't 'a' meant it," he said to himself; "an' Kate, she's said it too. Hooray!"

Then he threw his cap high in the air, and shouted so lustily that people who were passing turned to look at him. Just then he saw Mr. Bradley coming up the street leaning heavily on Dave, and he waited to help them up the stairs.

"Can we ever get him up?" asked Dave, doubtfully.

"We've got ter, I spect," was the answer. "I've thunk that about yerself afore now, Dave."

"You will never think it again. Let's get him right to bed. I don't like to have the girls see him. I'll bring his supper to him."

"How kin I do it?" asked Bob of Kate, as the family sat around the supper-table, — "I'arn ter fling gab, yer know? I'd like ter git ter be a dabster at it."

"We've just been talking about it," answered Kate. "There is an evening school; if you could go —"

"But I can't," answered Bob; "there's Dave an' the old man what's got ter be took care of."

"Dave says he won't drink any more," said Kate.

"He has said it afore," answered Bob.

"I should be afraid if Bob was n't here," said Mamie; and Dave kept his eyes on his book. He knew that he did not deserve to

be trusted, and that he had himself to blame because his sisters were afraid of him; but it was very hard for him to bear.

“Why can’t you gals hit me a clip when I gits things wrong?” said Bob; “it would make me think, an’ —”

The girls laughed heartily. “Why, Bob,” said Mamie, “if we should you’d be pounded to a jelly.”

“What kin I do, then? asked Bob, disconsolately. “Can’t yer l’arn me like they do in evenin’-schools?”

“We have taught you all we know ourselves,” answered Kate. “Either we did n’t know very much or you learned very fast.”

“I’ll tell you,” said Mamie. “Every time you say a thing wrong, we’ll make you say it over again. How will that do?”

“I should think —” said Dave.

An unearthly scream from the next room interrupted him, and brought the frightened children to their feet. Dave and Bob hur-

ried into the room, and a man from the floor below rushed upstairs to see what was the trouble.

"Delirium tremens," he said, helping the boys hold the crazy man on the bed. "Get a doctor, quick!"

Dave went, as he was not so helpful in the sick-room as Bob, and the doctor soon arrived and administered remedies.

"Boys," he said, "you will soon see how a drunkard dies. If either of you," and he looked keenly at Dave, "has been in the habit of drinking, you may learn a lesson now which you cannot afford to lose."

The two boys watched by the bedside all the night, and as long as they live they cannot forget what they saw. The next morning Kate did not go to her work as usual, and Bob obtained leave from Mr. Ware to stay at home and help Dave. It was nearly noon when Mrs. Manning entered the room.

"My dear little girl," she said, taking Kate in her arms, "I have had such a time trying to find you. Why didn't you come to me, child? You have worried me."

And then the children told her the whole of the dreadful story.

"David Bradley!" she said. "Let me see him at once."

The children took her into the room where the sick man lay, and as she bent over him, she said: "Yes, it is David Bradley, poor Dora's husband. Kate, why haven't I guessed it before? I knew you looked like my people. I am your mother's sister, dear, and your Aunt Myra; and this little girl," turning to Mamie, "is the picture of her mother."

"I am glad of that," answered Mamie, "for now you can't help liking me."

"And this is my nephew, I suppose," said Mrs. Manning, turning to Bob.

"No, ma'am," he answered; "but I wish't I was. I'd like ter b'long ter you."

"I'm not a nephew to be proud of," said Dave, huskily ; "but I mean to be !" And Aunt Myra patted his head in a motherly way that was very comforting.

When Mr. Bradley died, she had him buried, and took all four children home with her until she could decide what was best for them. It was finally decided that Dave should go to her brother, who lived on a large farm in Dakota, where he would not be subjected to the temptations of city life ; and though his sisters grieved over the separation, they did not feel so badly as they would have done six months before. They rejoice over his reformation, but they no longer idolize the boy who forfeited their respect.

Mrs. Manning went to see Mr. Ware about Bob. "I have taken a great interest in him," she said, "and should like to take him into my home and educate him."

"I've taken a liking to him too," said Mr. Ware, "and I want to keep him here."

But Mrs. Manning talked very fast and very long, and it was finally decided to let Bob choose for himself.

"I 'll stay with yer both," he said. "I wants ter live with Mrs. Manning, an' I wants ter work fer you;" and he had his way about it.

After a while it was decided that Bob must have a name.

"Suppose I give him mine?" said Mr. Ware.

"Must I have two names?" asked Bob.

"To be sure," said Mr. Ware and Mrs. Manning and both the girls.

Bob was silent a moment. "If yer please," he said, "I'd like ter have Andy's name. Could n't I be Mr. Bob Andy?"

"Not very well," said Mr. Ware, trying not to laugh.

"He can be Robert Lowell," said Mr. Lowell, who came just in time to hear what he had said. "I didn't think I could afford to have so many boys; but Andrew will never be quite happy without Bob, and Bertie is n't happy un-

less Andrew is, and so I don't see what else I can do."

"Yer hain't got no call ter take me if yer don't want me yerself," said Bob.

"What an independent young man he is!" exclaimed Mr. Lowell, laughing. "My boy, I do want you. I have wanted you from the first, but I thought I could n't afford so many boys, and I let Bertie choose."

That night Robert and Andrew Lowell slept with their arms thrown around each other. Kate and Mamie occupied the beautiful little room which Aunt Myra said was to be theirs, now they were her girls. Dave had a nice large room in his uncle Tom's pleasant country home, and every member of the Queer Family was contented.

THE END.

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B. F. L. Bindery.
MAR 18 1908

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